When technology and health feed each other: An example of a successful virtual model with global impact

May 5, 2020



Ana Rita González, ScD, CPH,
President & CEO, Policy Wisdom, LLC

One thing a pandemic brings forefront besides panic, crisis and fear, is the opportunity to look closely to what we are doing and how, in order to make it better. It is the undeniable moment of reinventing, restructuring and reimagining how to do things… better. The coronavirus pandemic is no exception. It has forced organizations to empty luxurious corporate offices and move to the most basic of spaces… the corner of the dining room, which often is shared by other members of the family too. Health and technology are often tied by many links, particularly as a source of patients' information, telemedicine, and billing. But there is much more to learn about a virtual business model, not only due to the current situation, given that our office is more than the desk we sit in, but rather since the world is our office.

Globalization has allowed us precisely the luxury of living anywhere and being able to provide service, support, and efficient business solutions even from the beach. If there is one extraordinary lesson from our business model is that it works flawlessly, that it is more efficient and manageable, and that you can still attract the best minds in the world even without corporate headquarters. Policy Wisdom LLC is an example of business ingenuity, commitment to excellence and innovation which my husband and I conceived a decade ago in our dining room.

At that time if might have seemed crazy to develop a 100% virtual model attempting to serve the world and attract/retain high caliber professionals, according to their flexibility and from their own spaces, to support our public health policy projects. It not only worked, it thrived! A decade later we have served over 35 clients with more than 500 projects led by an 87% women workforce, whom are also moms, daughters, wives, and friends. Needless to mention, the men in our company also want to have a more balanced life and the opportunity to be an integral part of their children's lives and communities. All are leading professionals/experts in their respective fields.

As a leader of a global successful virtual company, in the past decade I have learned that not having an office is not a limitation to achieving global growth. I also learned that our work/life balance philosophy resulted in the lowest overhead a company can have. Our consultants work at their pace and availability while complying with project needs, adapting their agendas and enjoying what they are passionate about-- impacting public health worldwide. Basically, our "work force" develops the projects based on their expertise, availability, and the project needs, regardless of geographic location.

So why do I recommend you considering a virtual business model?



- As companies get hit financially by the coronavirus crisis, a virtual business model makes sense, is easy and fast to migrate to, is flexible for one or many employees, and is feasible economically.
- A virtual model increases the possibilities and opportunities for companies to expand their footprint beyond a physical location, allowing for the export of services in a seamless way. Now the market is the world, not your immediate region or continent.
- The coronavirus crisis is forcing all to see business in a different manner and showing that today more than ever businesses should consider models that enable people to work away from traditional offices when possible.
- A virtual model is specifically appropriate for crisis management and supporting health issues with global impact, as it allows immediate access to resources and experts from close and afar, fast response and proper management despite physical location. Social media potentiates that access for relevant, credible and accurate information/education.
- Also, on a more personal level, a 100% virtual model can also foster fellowship and personal growth/support. Informal groups, WhatsApp chats, "it's 5 o'clock somewhere" and "water cooler conversation" are encouraged, just in a different way. This builds a team that supports each other on non-work-related issues. A cubicle or the walls between a building are not the only place where people can interact. There are many ways and tools to humanize the virtual world and provide immediate recognition…a click or an email away!

Finally, virtual does not mean lonely; collaboration and interaction throughout project development is key. Virtual also means agility and access since the Internet does not sleep, adding the advantage of different time zones around the world. So, while some team members are resting, others continue to advance on projects. Speed and flexibility are an added value.

Most importantly for me, as a public health professional, it means being able to impact the world one project at a time while being able to enjoy the coziness of our homes in rural Argentina and in sunny Miami… it is almost a perfect model combining the most advanced technology that enables a virtual business with the most basic need of being home with my family, the place that I love the most. It works, it is feasible, and your company can do it too!

Ana Rita González