

Dialed

WHITE PAPER

THE RISE OF UNIFIED DIGITAL WORKSPACES

Taking control of workplace app overload to align
and focus knowledge workers

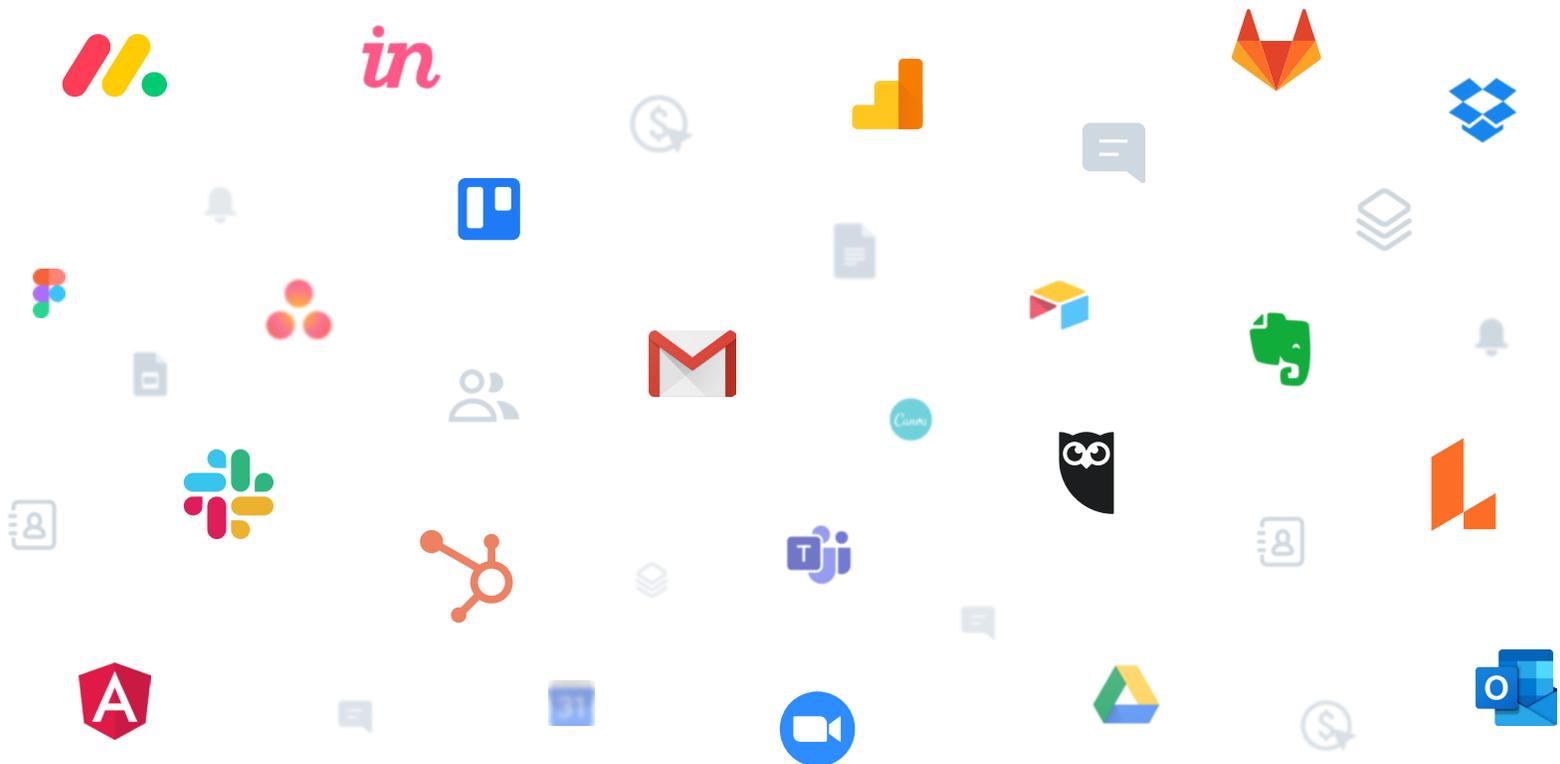


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Lost time is never found again
-Benjamin Franklin

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Modern work is quietly being undermined by the very technology that espouses to improve it – workplace productivity applications.

Today, a growing number of organizations wake up and realize they have over 60 disparate workplace apps – with larger organizations using thousands. As a result, cognitive whiplash and distraction runs rampant, with knowledge workers switching between apps and tabs 10 to 30 times each hour¹. Knowledge workers now waste up to two hours per day responding to notifications² and dealing with interruptions, while an average of 2.5 hours a day is lost searching for information³.

The result is a lot of activity but less meaningful work.

For organizations, the cost of workplace app overload is staggering, distracted work costs American businesses \$650 billion per year⁴.

To address workplace app proliferation, a new category of **Unified Digital Workspaces** are emerging to solve the challenges of tool overload. This paper outlines how and why a new class of cloud-based software is needed to identify and serve up the exact context and information that knowledge workers need, from whatever tools they already use.

THE DARKER SIDE OF WORKPLACE APPS

Despite promising better collaboration and productivity, today's dizzying array of cloud-based workplace apps ends up creating fragmented and misaligned work. Knowledge workers suffer due to continuous distraction, wasted time spent jumping between apps and tabs, and the struggle to find useful information. Initially loved by employees, the overlay of too many workplace apps has now produced a workforce that is increasingly frustrated and disheartened. More than 70% of knowledge workers report feeling distracted on the job with 16% saying they almost always feel unfocused⁵.

Knowledge workers are on the front lines of this battle for meaningful work and they're losing through no fault of their own. As the number of apps skyrocket, so do the tactics to compete for their attention. Often borrowing addiction engineering practices from social media platforms utilizing constant notifications, gamification, and pop-ups forcing interruptions. Consequently, knowledge workers are conditioned to respond quickly to every piece of information that arrives, regardless of its relevance or urgency.

This is the nature of modern work and, to put it bluntly – it's broken.

“Another study, of 38,000 knowledge workers across different sectors, found that the simple act of being interrupted is one of the biggest barriers to productivity. Even multitasking, that prized feat of modern-day office warriors, turns out to be a myth.”

Susan Cain – author and co-founder of Quiet Revolution

From a business perspective, the frustration is equally high. As organizations embrace remote and autonomous work styles, the wholesale adoption of workplace apps has occurred with very little structure or strategy. While a tolerant attitude towards knowledge workers, clients, and collaborators adopting whatever tools they prefer has increased a sense of autonomy, it has also led to a digital form of organizational chaos. Executive teams know everyone is working hard, but struggle to keep track of what is being worked on, where it is being stored, and what actions need to be taken next.

MEGATRENDS IN DIGITAL WORK TODAY

It's clear that the nature of work has changed forever. Looking at today's Digital workplaces, there's a host of megatrends that have reshaped operations and performance. Here are the top disruptive forces impacting businesses of all types:

- 1. Distributed Work:** increasing number of knowledge workers now work from wherever they are comfortable and productive, resulting in communication and culture moving away from a centralized physical location. Cloud apps are relied on to facilitate this exploding paradigm.
- 2. Autonomous Work:** today's knowledge workers are empowered and expected to manage their work, working practices and tool preferences. This trend isn't going to change.
- 3. Attention Economy:** workplace apps vie for attention, conditioning users to respond to notifications in an immediate, addictive fashion. Consequently, the same tools which claim to improve productivity end up undermining it.
- 4. Workplace App Anarchy:** an avalanche of cloud apps — communication, collaboration, point solution tools — are overwhelming knowledge workers and organizations alike.
- 5. Tab Proliferation:** the average knowledge worker has at least a dozen tabs open at any given time. This compounds the issue of navigating between decentralized applications, trying to corral disparate information into the project at hand.

IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES

The changing human and technical aspects of work, as outlined in the mega-trends above, have far reaching consequences. Knowledge workers, teams, and organizations of all sizes are part of a growing consensus that see the current explosion of workplace apps trend as untenable. Here's why:

- 1. Business Suffers:** trying to track and manage work across a mishmash of workplace apps and tabs has reached a boiling point – business leaders feel they are flying blind and performance results are siloed and hard to track.
- 2. Work is Broken:** lack of focus due to app overload and constant disruption has resulted in millions of professionals being increasingly busy yet less productive as they struggle to meet demanding KPIs.
- 3. Always On Work:** despite best efforts to strike a work-life balance, the majority of that knowledge workers are now conditioned to be 'on' 24/7, and they feel a false sense of satisfaction by responding instantly to a constant disruptive stream of notifications.
- 4. Multitasking and Misalignment:** today's fragmented workplace app paradigm has rendered focused collaborative work disorienting, and work is not effectively aligned with business objectives.
- 5. Modern Work = Unhappy People:** a sense of helplessness and frustration causes knowledge workers to feel personally responsible for disjointed work and lack of focus, when it is actually the result of an untenable work environment.

THE EMERGENCE OF UNIFIED DIGITAL WORKSPACES

Enter the new category Unified Digital Workspaces, meta-platforms that help organize and integrate information residing in multiple workplace apps. These new solutions aim to solve the following challenges:

- 1. Conquer Workplace App Chaos:** help knowledge workers gain control over application anarchy by providing a unified space with easy access to all the applications required for a given project.
- 2. Promote Context and Access:** centralize all of the files and resources needed so as to eliminate hunting across emails, tabs, and applications.
- 3. Encourage Alignment:** support overall objectives of the business by bringing the right people, communication, and tools into a single digital work environment.
- 4. Break the Cycle of Distraction:** provide a digital workspace that supports focus and accomplishment by filtering out interruptions.
- 5. Support Modern Work:** help professionals adapt and thrive within the realities of today's distributed work dynamics.
- 6. Unify Tools and Work:** provide contextual digital workspaces that centralize all relevant work elements and eliminate the need to download yet another workplace apps.

A BETTER APPROACH FOR DIGITAL WORK

The nature of work is continually evolving. The most recent trend in workplace reconfiguration has been a physical one: the glory days of private offices evolved into a one-size-fits-all-approach of open bullpens and tightly packed workbench-style seating. While removing walls to better connect people was an innovative, human-centric solution, a lack of privacy has hindered the completion of tasks that require intense concentration. That's why new designs now incorporate isolation rooms, soundproof phone booths and more intimate "team spaces" to promote focus and reduce distraction.

But as more and more knowledge workers, teams, and organizations work remotely,

"The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is ... to increase the productivity of knowledge work and the knowledge worker."

Peter Drucker – Management Consultant

it is not the physical space that demands to be reimagined, but the digital one. Unified Digital Workspaces are precisely this reimagining: an emergent class of meta-platforms that bring organization, contextual relevance, and much-needed focus to digital work environments so that knowledge workers are empowered to do their best work.

As a category, Unified Digital Workspaces seek to:

- Make tools serve workers, not workers serve tools
- Bring clarity and alignment to individual and collaborative digital work
- Create design solutions informed by research on how the brain actually works
- Reduce distraction and frustration
- Create a happy medium between stifling structure and decentralized chaos
- Support the realities of modern knowledge work

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF UNIFIED DIGITAL WORKSPACES

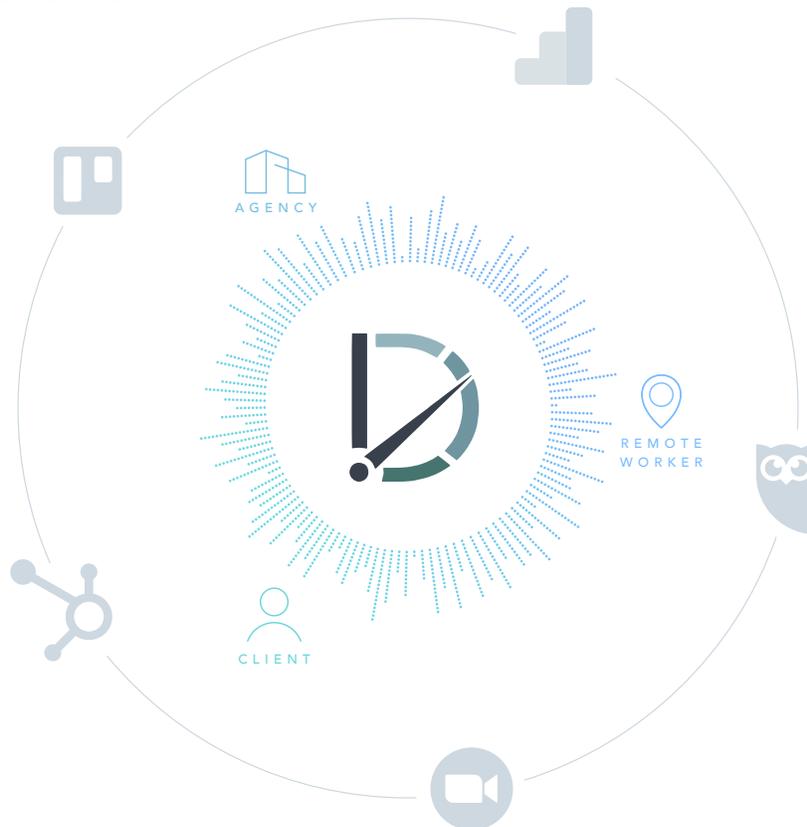
As outlined above, digital work environments are desperately in need of a solution that brings clarity and focus, while still empowering knowledge workers to be innovative and maintain flexibility and autonomy in their work style. **Unified Digital Workspaces** are designed to do just that.

- 1. Unifies tools and work:** Unified Digital Workspaces neatly assemble everything you need into a single screen with simple navigation, integrated viewing, and search capabilities that don't require contextswitching.
- 2. Easy to find and share resources:** By centralizing all of the relevant files, resources, and links into one space, Unified Digital Workspaces eliminate the need to hunt through emails, tabs, and applications.
- 3. Promote business alignment:** Unified Digital Workspaces can be shared among collaborators and the organization, tracking toolsets, and sources of record, as well as providing clarity on organizational priorities.
- 4. Breaks the cycle of distraction:** By filtering out irrelevant notifications and reducing context switching, Unified Digital Workspaces optimize knowledge workers' precious cognitive calories.
- 5. Avoids the need for more software or standardization:** As an open integration platform supporting all web-based tools, Unified Digital Workspaces allow knowledge workers to select best of breed tools, while providing organizational visibility into what tools are used where.

Through the application of these 5 principles, Unified Digital Workspaces offer an environment where knowledge workers can feel more calm, focused, and fulfilled by contributing meaningful, productive work.

ABOUT DIALED

At Dialed, we are committed to advancing the emerging movement of Unified Digital Workspaces through thought leadership and working with knowledge workers, organizations, and the industry at-large to push back against fragmented work and increase workplace satisfaction and productivity. With years of experience facing the problems outlined in this paper, our team has developed Focusboards, a simple solution that organizes existing tools, relevant communications and resources by project or client. The result is a focused, unified digital workspace, accessible on any browser, and designed to feel familiar.



For more information about Unified Digital Workspaces and early access to Focusboards, visit www.Dialed.ai and follow us on our socials.   

Sources: ¹RingCentral ²IDC ³IDC ⁴The Economist ⁵BusinessNewsDaily
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