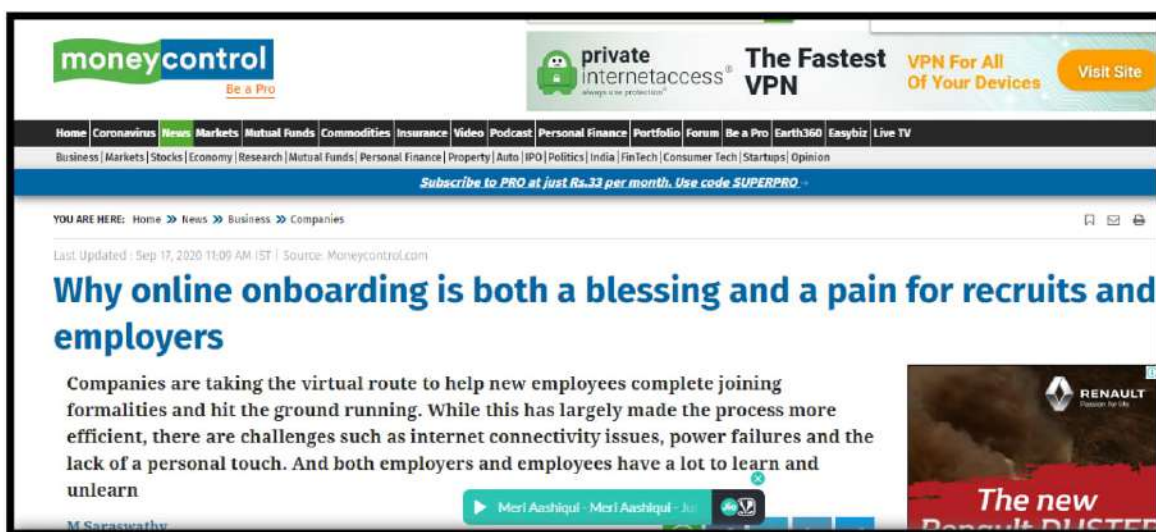


Media Coverage

Publication	Date	Edition	Link	Headline
Money control	17 Sept 2020	Online	https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/business/companies/why-online-onboarding-is-both-a-blessing-and-a-pain-for-recruits-and-employers-5850091.html	Why Online Onboarding Is Both A Blessing And A Pain For Recruits And Employers



A human resources officer at a Pune-based financial services firm was earlier involved primarily with talent acquisition. Amidst the Coronavirus outbreak, she has an additional duty: ensuring that new hires are onboarded with necessary documents and participate in the mandatory one-week induction training.

“Online onboarding is perceived to be quicker. While that is true, the digital process also has its own challenges. Simple tasks like documentation have to be done properly. I had two joinees who uploaded their identity cards in the wrong format and hence their employee code wasn’t generated. So, I am literally having to hand-hold every candidate to ensure that they complete the form accurately,” she explained.

It is close to six months since a nationwide lockdown was announced to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. With this, employee onboarding — joining formalities for new recruits — has also moved online.

India has more than 500 million organised job roles with close to 10 million new roles added every year, Though the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced the number of new hires across companies, the pace of employment is picking up. With this, the demand for virtual onboarding is expected to rise.

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What is onboarding and how long does it take?

Apart from filling up the joining form and submitting documents such as educational certificates and past employment records (if any), onboarding involves mandatory training on the Dos and Don'ts of the workplace, including legal aspects such as sexual harassment prevention. Onboarding can take anywhere from one to seven days, depending on the company.

RP Yadav, CMD of human resources firm Genius Consultants, told Moneycontrol that his company onboards close to 1,500-2,000 people every month across companies and that the process is now fully online.

"Till March, only 10 percent of new recruits were onboarded digitally, while 90 percent was physical. Now the trend has reversed. This process is efficient but there are also challenges in connectivity since internet quality is not the same throughout the country. And candidates also tend to make mistakes in form filling, uploading documents and completing onboarding remotely. So, we are working to make this process seamless and error free," he added.

Companies are also looking to continue with the virtual onboarding process once Covid is brought under control since it saves time and costs.

How has the experience been so far for companies?

While India Inc has been working on moving the onboarding process online, the lockdown forced companies to make the pivot quicker.

Reena Wahi, SVP and Head, Human Resources, Business Excellence and CSR at Tata Realty & Infrastructure, said that before the lockdown, the company was working on designing a virtual onboarding experience for new talent.

Wahi explained that the launch of virtual desktop infrastructure from April 1 addressed the challenge of transportation of IT assets to new hires' residences during the peak of the lockdown, providing access to data and work tools on personal computers in a secured way.

The company also leveraged collaboration tools (such as Microsoft Teams), allowing new hires to connect and engage with their managers and teammates.

Induction training programmes, which were earlier longer because employees from across locations had to assemble in one location, are now getting completed quicker.

Ashutosh Mishra, Head, HR, Dish TV India, explained that close to 90 new employees have joined the company since the lockdown and all have been completely onboarded online. "We are able to have a faster induction process. Earlier, for induction, we had to wait for 2-3 weeks because employees would be required to travel to one central office. But now the process is online," he explained.

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Another challenge is when a new recruit joins a company, he/she may not be fully aware of what is considered appropriate/inappropriate based on the office culture. To deal with this, 'buddies' or mentors are provided to help handhold the staff member for the first few weeks.

Wahi of Tata Realty said that her company assigns a 'welcome buddy' to provide even more direct support in the first 30 days. She added that video interactions during these introductory meetings bridge potential communication gaps by providing the ability to express tone and body language.

Some companies have been better prepared than others. Recognised official platforms such as Microsoft Teams are being widely used for onboarding.

Adarsh Mishra, CHRO, Panasonic India, told Moneycontrol that the company has onboarded more than 65 new employees virtually in the COVID-19 era. "We have been virtually on-boarding new joiners since last year. Our in-house team uses our internal platform for joining formalities and MS Teams to stay connected with the candidates and handhold them through the entire interview process," he said.

But Mishra also added that the challenges here include power failures and lack of connectivity in remote locations.

When the numbers are huge, personalised processes may not be possible. Mayank Kumar, Co-founder and MD of online learning platform upGrad, said that in August alone the company had onboarded more than 460 employees. In September, it has so far onboarded 390 employees.

"While on-boarding, one of the challenges that remains is giving our new employees a personalised on-boarding experience. The regular logistical problems regarding asset allocation were experienced initially during the lockdown period. But we have overcome all that," he added.

The employee perspective

New recruits across companies felt that the process is largely better than form filling. Tanvi Malhotra, a 34-year-old software developer who joined a Pune-based edtech firm in July, told Moneycontrol that regular onboarding would take up almost the entire day in her previous stints.

"Companies have lengthy forms which take hours to fill. Then multiple physical copies of certificates, work experience credentials and identity proof have to be attached, which also wastes a lot of paper. The online process is much faster," she said.

However, Malhotra is quick to add that physical interactions and observing colleagues would help new employees navigate the workplace better. For instance, she had worked at an IT firm earlier, where there was a very formal setting, be it in everyday communication, work timings or meeting attire. At her new company, things are 'more informal', which she realised only after 30-40 days.

What do the experts say?

Employee automation firm Tydy is of the view that virtual onboarding is the new normal. Kiran Menon, its co-founder and CEO, said that onboarding should in fact begin the day a candidate accepts the offer letter.

Menon added that apart from compliance, new joiners should also be informed about the work culture, growth opportunities, colleagues and key contacts. He added that his firm is able to reduce the burden of these repetitive tasks on companies by using technology and real-time data.



"This can lead to huge time and money savings while also ensuring employees go from zero to productive in the shortest possible time, no matter where in the world they are working from," added Menon.

Similarly, documentation workflow solutions provider SignDesk is of the view that using technology could minimise errors.

Ashok Kadsur, co-founder of SignDesk, said that digital onboarding, including identity verification and document verification, can be made seamless due to machine learning and artificial intelligence.

"For example, we have now got the technology to read identifying information off images of documents and match them with information from the issuing authority, and we can also match the faces of customers with the pictures on their IDs. Additionally, we use anti-fraud filters to reduce chances of identity and document fraud," he added.

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