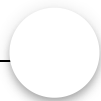

CORONAVIRUS, PEOPLE, REMOTE WORK

With staff returning to the office, everyone wants their own bar fridge

ARON LEWIN MAY 20, 2020





Enforcing social distancing in the office might be easier if everyone is separated by their own bar fridge.

As Australian employers and employees contemplate returning to office-based work as coronavirus restrictions are eased, Office National chief executive Gavin Ward says sales of personal office supplies including label makers, labels, disposable wooden cutlery, staples and bar fridges are skyrocketing as everyone wants access to their own things.

The business is reporting a 200% increase in sales of its range of disposable cups, plates and cutlery and a “significant shift” towards sales of individual sugar and coffee sachets, compared to larger jars and tins.

It’s also seeing a growing preference from shoppers for single-serve, individually wrapped lollies and biscuits, over larger packets and containers.

This comes amid a suite of suggestions from Ward — who runs a branch of the largest network of independent stationery stores in Australia — that businesses will begin removing hot desks, offering more sick leave flexibility and reducing shared items as office-based work resumes.

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It also follows reports of significant demand growth for the products on offer at Officeworks over the two months to late-April, following an increase in employees working from home.

Ward attributes the increase in single-use wooden cutlery to anxiety about reusing and recycling, which he says “has become a scary thought for many”.

“We are going to see a lot more people using and bringing single-use items into the workplace,” Ward says.

He adds that a reduction in the use of shared items may also see the distribution of office survival packs.

“We are already seeing a surge in the purchase of label makers and labels so that people and workplaces can place labels on certain items to create ownership and avoid unwanted use by others,” he says.

“Labelling everything will be the new norm.”

Harkening back to the days of the office cubicle, Ward is also noticing an uptick in sales of barriers for between desks, which he says will be “essential in order to maintain effective social distancing” in the workplace.

“We are setting a lot of office screens that can be easily placed between desks, They are commonly known as rapid screens because they can be erected quickly between and around desks,” he says.

“Cubicles and screens will be the new norm — much like a return to the old days 30 years ago when offices were more compartmentalised.

“These rules will be with us for a while, so you might as well study up and learn how to enforce them effectively.”

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