Sonos plans return-to-office push for its product teams

Sonos will soon encourage employees on its various product teams who live near its US office locations to come in for at least two days per week, *The Verge* has learned. That's a notable break from the company's history, throughout which Sonos has enthusiastically supported fully remote and hybrid work. Job listings at Sonos routinely state that "it's about impact, not location." Glassdoor reviews have long backed this up, with employees reporting no pressure to come into the office.

But that lax stance is set to change slightly as Sonos continues its effort to right the ship following this year's app mishap and stay on track with upcoming products. It's adopting a stricter policy that will call for product employees within proximity of Santa Barbara, Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco to regularly be present at those offices. The Santa Barbara location is where Sonos is headquartered. The company also currently operates international offices in Paris and the Netherlands

"Flexibility has been a core tenet of how Sonos has operated since our founding. Flexibility is not going away, but like many companies, we are evaluating the impact that in-person collaboration has on the effectiveness of our teams and our culture," Sonos said in a statement provided by spokesperson Olivia Singer.

"Sonos product teams rely heavily on collaboration, collective problem-solving, and hands-on testing. These are activities which we believe can be done more effectively in-person. We will be prioritizing office space for our product teams to

collaborate in-person 2+ days per week depending on location (proximity to office), role, and current needs. Many Sonos employees and teams, however, will see no change to their current work situation."

Employees at Sonos tell me that morale remains low internally — it's been that way since the app controversy spiraled into a crisis — with some fearing another wave of layoffs in the coming weeks after 100 employees were cut back in April.

New job postings from the company have been extremely thin in recent weeks as Sonos tightens its belt amid sluggish demand. During last month's quarterly earnings call, CEO Patrick Spence and CFO Saori Casey said Sonos will take whatever steps are necessary to keep the balance sheet where it needs to be as the audio company navigates a challenging period for its business. Those measures already include leaning more heavily on AI to field customer support requests.

The new Sonos Arc Ultra has received positive reviews across the board, including from yours truly. But a single product hasn't gone far in convincing rank-and-file employees (or the company's most ardent customers) that Sonos is back on the right trajectory for the long haul.

Return-to-office mandates have become common across the tech industry; many large companies require employees to badge in at least three days each week. Amazon made waves earlier this year when it announced a return to the traditional five-day office work week.

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