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From the Portland Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2020/04/23/middle-market-2020-how-ruby-moved-450-workstations.html>

Middle Market 2020

Middle Market 2020: How Ruby moved 450 workstations to home offices in one week

'Ruby had never had a work-from-home strategy'

Apr 23, 2020, 11:29am PDT Updated: Apr 27, 2020, 9:44am PDT

"It's a complex setup," said CEO Kate Winkler.

Receptionists who work for the virtual receptionist company Ruby have large workstations: desktop computers, two monitors, a specialized headset.

On Feb. 28, the day the Oregon Health Authority reported the first coronavirus case in Oregon, Winkler decided to move the Portland-based company's offices here and in Kansas City to remote work.

That meant disassembling the desks of the company's 450 receptionists as quickly as possible and figuring out how to move them to workers' homes. Winkler also had to figure out how to establish secure connections so receptionists could work remotely and not accidentally disclose the confidential information of Ruby clients.



RUBY RECEPTIONISTS

Kate Winkler, CEO of Ruby Receptionists

This story is part of the PBJ's Middle Market 2020 coverage. [More pieces on Oregon and Southwest Washington's rising companies can be found here.](#)

"It was an unbelievable task," she said. "Ruby had never had a work-from-home strategy."

Immediately, hands went up in the air. Workers with vans volunteered to transport workstations. Others brought carts and bubble-wrap to the office, anything that would help get computers and desks quickly packed up.

"The number of Rubys who raised their hands and said, "How can I help?" is inspiring," she said.

(Editor's note: The company calls its employees "Rubys.")

Winkler is leaning on that cooperative DNA as she steers the company through the economic crisis caused by coronavirus.

Founded in 2003, Ruby provides receptionist services to small businesses. With the economic crisis ravaging small businesses, Winkler has already made the company's first big pivot.

Some of Ruby's traditional customers – such as orthodontist offices – don't need a virtual receptionist right now. For customers like that, Ruby is developing creative pricing offers and helping them downgrade.

For other customers, Ruby is expanding its hours of operation.

Before coronavirus, most small businesses got calls between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. With many people working remotely while juggling domestic tasks, more calls are coming in after-hours, including for customers like plumbing and electrical companies. With people spending more hours at home, more dishwashers and sinks are in need of repair.

Ruby now has receptionists working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

So far, Ruby hasn't had a noticeable drop in sales, but Winkler said the company has experienced some "temporary churn."

Winkler, who started work on Sept. 1, hopes to build on Ruby's enviable culture through "over-communicating" corporate decisions. The company's workforce skews young.

"We're over-communicating what could possibly happen," she said. "For the vast majority of our workforce, they've never been through something like this."

Winkler has communicated the basic coronavirus strategy to all employees: new round-the-clock service, remote work expected until June, economic effects that could linger 18 months.

Since Rubys can't turn the phones off, Winkler's communicating with employees using every asynchronous tool at her disposal, including all-staff email, an employee website and video updates.

She's also keeping a finger on the company's culture and encouraging its frequent pet contests and virtual dance parties. She's encouraging employees to take breaks and pay attention to their mental and emotional health.

"Take time in the middle of the day for a walk," she said. "Go play fetch with your dog."

Big numbers:

\$60.5 million = 2019 revenue

585 = employees

Feb. 28 = the day Ruby shifted to remote work

11 = number of days it took the company to shift to remote work

24/7/365 service = new addition to the business plan

Ruby Receptionists

Headquarters: Portland

Ownership: Private

What it does: Virtual receptionist

CEO: Kate Winkler

Employees: 585

Revenue: \$60.5 million

Matthew Kish

Staff Reporter

Portland Business Journal

