

What Is Telecommuting And How Is It Going To Help My Business?

Telecommuting is a fancy word for allowing employees to work from home, in remote offices, or while on the road. While this is not a new concept, recent advancements in remote access technology and security have made it very affordable and easy for even micro business owners.

Why would a business want to do this? Some businesses are being forced to because they've run out of office space or to accommodate "road warriors." But many are doing it for these reasons...

- Business owners (and key managers) working 60+ hours a week are using it as a way to continue working after hours and on weekends from the convenience of their home office.
- Allowing employees to work from home means businesses can cut back on office space, lowering rent and utility bills – and according to a recent survey of small businesses, nearly 40% of small and medium businesses have (or plan to) cut down office space and allow employee to work remotely from home to save money. Not only is this lowering overhead, but it's making for happier employees who no longer have to fill their gas tanks.
- Telecommuting actually increases employee productivity, lowers stress levels, and improves retention. Contrary to what you may believe, employees who work from home tend to work *more*, not less. Because the computer is right there in their home, they will often put in extra hours during the evening and on weekends when they normally wouldn't be able to access the network. Plus, employees working on detailed programs, graphics, and projects tend to get more done when they don't have to deal with office distractions.
- Some companies are allowing their employees to work from home two or three days out of a week instead of giving them a raise – a bonus many will gladly take over more money. This also works well if you have limited office space because employees can rotate desk usage.
- It allows you to keep great employees that need or want to relocate, need to stay home to take care of a sick family member, or who are sick, injured, pregnant, or otherwise unable to physically come into the office.

Common Myths, Mistakes, and Misconceptions About Allowing Your Employees To Work From Home

One of the biggest fears many business owners have about allowing people to work from home is the loss of control they have over that person. They believe that without someone standing over them, employees will goof off during work hours and become LESS productive.

But the hard results prove very different...

Telecommuting has grown at a steady 3% per year for more than 15 years. Currently, more than **23 million people are working from home** at least one day a week. The increase in teleworking programs is no accident – it really IS working.

Admittedly, original telecommuting experiments were “do-gooder” projects focused on being earth friendly and generating business savings by reducing use of high priced big city office space. However, when businesses started seeing how it drastically improved turnover and productivity, this “fad” became a hot trend.

Take the Los Angeles Bank for example; they decided to test telecommuting to see if it would help their 33% turnover rate. Here were the results...

The experiment worked and within a year the turnover rate was cut to nearly zero and to everyone’s surprise productivity went up 18% saving the regional bank more than \$3 million dollars per year.

Since then there have been numerous, well documented, program studies reflecting promising results. For instance AT&T allowed employees to telecommute on a regular basis from home in a New Jersey office of 600 people.

Over a 5 year period a region of AT&T saved more than \$11 million annually. Half the savings came from real estate savings while the other came from a measured increase in incremental work hours from employees who were able to have a higher level of concentration with fewer interruptions.

You’re probably thinking, “**But I don’t have 600 employees...how does this apply to me?**” No matter how small your business or your real estate situation, you can save money. It’ll just be a bit smaller than AT&T. For instance:

On average, small businesses report saving \$85,000 to \$93,000 per year in lower turnover, reduced operating costs (gas, utilities, office space) and increased productivity after implementing teleworking programs. (Source: International Teleworking Advocacy Group)

Of course, telecommuting might not be right for every employee on staff, but it is a great option (and reward) for key managers or employees who are self-motivated and measured by results rather than hours worked.

The Single Most Important Thing You Must Have In Place Before Starting A Work From Home Program Or Setting Up Remote Access For Road Warriors

Before you go “whole hog” with a telecommuting or remote access, we recommend conducting a small test where you (and possibly a few key managers) are set up to work from home.

Once you are comfortable with the concept, you may start allowing a few key employees to work from home one day a week or a couple of days a month. Or, you can simply allow employees to use it while traveling or if they are forced to stay home to take care of a child, on a snow day, etc.

But the single most important thing for you to do first is find a very experienced IT consultant who will recommend and implement the right technology to support YOUR specific situation and needs. This is unbelievably important to avoiding expensive mistakes and unnecessary frustration.

8 CRITICAL Characteristics You Should Absolutely DEMAND From Any IT Professional You're Considering To Set-up Your Remote Office Technology; DO NOT Trust Your Infrastructure To Anyone Who Does Not Meet These Criteria!

There is no "one size fits all" solution; the best solution is greatly dependant on your specific business needs, the applications you use, how many people will be accessing your systems remotely, the available equipment and dozens of other factors. That's why you want to look for a consultant who meets the following criteria:

- 1. Look for a consultant who has experience setting up remote access and STRONG (and recent) client references.**

Do you really want to be the person who “pays” for your consultant’s training? I’ve found that the price to correct problems created by novices is much greater than the cost to do it right the first time with an experienced technician. Ask for *recent* references and call them! Past performance is generally a good gauge of future performance.

2. Make sure they do a **THOROUGH** evaluation up front

If your consultant doesn’t insist on doing a thorough evaluation BEFORE handing you a proposal, do NOT hire them! If they don’t do their homework they could easily sell you the wrong solution, causing you to have to spend MORE money, MORE time, and have MORE frustration getting to what you really need. Most consultants will do a quick, cursory review and provide a free recommendation (proposal) because they want to close the deal fast. Here is a short list of the things they should investigate or ask you:

- What are your overall goals and specific objectives for allowing your employees to work from home or on the road?
- How many employees will be working remotely? Will they be accessing the network at the same time or at different times?
- What applications (including specialty or proprietary apps) and data will your employees need to access?
- What type of devices will your staff use to access the network? (Home computers, PDAs, Blackberries, laptops, etc.)
- What type of Internet connection will be available on the sending AND receiving end?
- What levels of security do you want in place?
- What level of monitoring do you want in place? For example, are there certain web sites and content you want “off limits?”
- Will the remote worker need to print documents?
- What are your 1 year and 3 year plans for growth?

3. Make sure they are able to **TRAIN** you and your staff.

So many computer consultants are great at installing the “stuff” but fall short on training you and your staff how to use the great “whiz-bang” technology they’ve just sold you. Make sure you hire someone who is able and willing to do the “hand holding” required when

installing any new process or technology...we're only human after all.

4. Make sure they can provide help desk support AFTER hours.

One of the main appeals to teleworking is the ability to work at night or on weekends; that means you need someone to be "on-call" during those off-peak hours if you or your employees have technical problems logging in or accessing the network. Bottom line, if your consultant doesn't offer after-hours support, don't hire them to do the job. There is no benefit to having remote access if you have to wait until Monday or 9am the next day for support.

5. Make sure they INSIST on maintaining the network

Virtual office networks require more 'care and feeding' to make sure they work properly and stay secure. You cannot "set it and forget it" or you're asking for problems. Only hire someone who is prepared to perform regular check-ups and updates of your network, usually under a maintenance or managed services plan.

6. Look for someone who can also solve the phone piece of the puzzle, not just the network access piece.

If you want your work-from-home employee to be able to make and receive calls and APPEAR as though they are in the office to the caller, then look for someone who can set up your phone system to work with your remote employee's home phone or cell phone. Usually this can be accomplished with VoIP technology (Voice Over Internet Protocol). Confirm that whoever you hire can either provide these services or has a partnership with a reputable vendor who has this expertise.

7. Make sure your consultant is willing and able to be a vendor liaison for your specific business applications or other specialty applications.

It's amazing how many critical applications work fine within the office network, but then slow down or shutdown when accessed through a remote location. It's important to ensure your consultant is able and willing to confirm your applications will operate efficiently remotely, which means they may need to get on the phone with the

help desk of one or more of your software vendors. Some consultants do NOT offer this service, or will charge you extra for it.

8. Look for a consultant has expertise in setting up employee monitoring and content filtering.

It's more difficult (but not impossible) to protect company secrets and proprietary information when it's stored on a location outside of your office. Therefore, make sure the company you hire has expertise in setting up and managing content filtering and security for remote machines.

Not Sure If You Are Ready To Set Up Remote Access? Our Free Remote Access Consultation Will Help You Decide

As a prospective client, we'd like to offer you a free Remote Access Consultation. At no charge, we will come to your office to review your current situation, business practices and needs and provide recommendations on how you can quickly and easily set up remote access for you and your staff.

We will also discuss your options, clarify any grey areas, and answer any questions you have. We will also map out the costs and steps involved so you know exactly what to expect.

You are under no obligations to do or buy anything; this is simply our way of introducing our services to you and demonstrating how we can make your remote access project a complete success.

Plus we'll give you a FREE "Home Office Action Pack" just for meeting with us! This package include:

- Home Office/Remote Office Checklist to help you verify the home or remote office is a safe and productive environment for the employee to work.
- Employee Agreement Template to outline the rules for your employees when working from home.
- Employee Equipment Issue Agreement to outline the rules of use and maintenance for any computer equipment, cell phones, PDAs, laptops, printers, etc. that are issued to the employee working remote.



What To Do Now

To request your Free Remote Access Consultation and FREE Home Office Action Pack,” do one of the following:

1. Complete our quick response form at www.technoadvantage.com/workfromhome-form
2. Call us direct at 888-498-9844
3. Send me an e-mail: info@technotc.com

A telecommuting expert from our office will call you to schedule a convenient time for us to meet for 20 minutes. Remember, there is no obligation for you to buy or do anything – this is simply a discovery meeting to see if remote access is right for you.

If you would like to speak to a few client references prior to our meeting, simply contact us and we’ll be happy to provide the names and phone numbers for several clients we’ve worked with.