

Successful remote working: 7 tips for home-based businesses

By Christian Arno

Home based or remote working has become a reality for many millions of people. With the advent of the internet era, a new type of employee was created. With little more than a computer and a high-speed internet connection, home-based businesses have flourished.

Of course, people have always worked from home, long before the internet came along. But remote working no longer feels so 'remote' – a myriad of technological advances has actually made it just as easy for two people to collaborate and communicate as though they are in the same building, even though they may be multiple time-zones apart.

For companies looking to operate a 'remote working' set up, here are 7 tips for successful remote working for home based businesses in the virtual world:

Successful remote working tip 1: Personality...

People are at the heart of any successful business. But not everyone is suited to remote working: self-motivation, initiative, time management and excellent communication skills are key attributes for anyone considering working away from the office. If an employee has worked in your organisation for a while, then you'll probably have a good idea as to how reliable they are.

If you are recruiting for a fresh remote-working role, then you'll need to establish from the interview and from references what type of character a person is. Remote working can be rather lonely, so an employee's personality must be able to cope with that scenario.

Remote working success tip 2: Skills...

Whilst you want the right character type for remote working, they must also be equipped with the right skills.

Those who work from home won't have dedicated in-house support staff to fix technical problems. If they can't get their laptop to connect to their Wi-Fi, they have to have at least some technological nous to circumvent the problem, even if they are receiving technical support by telephone. So luddites are perhaps best suited to an office environment...

Home based business success tip 3: Roles...

Even if a person has the right temperament and skills to cope with a home-working setup, their job remit might simply mean that remote working won't work. Obviously, a client-facing role doesn't lend itself too well to remote working – it won't exude the right level of professionalism if a client meets with you in your living room.

Furthermore, large companies with many departments may find that having everyone under one roof is the easiest way to operate: remote working lends itself better to small to medium sized companies. Too many people in too many different locations may mean that it's too difficult to get everyone pushing in the same direction.

Tip 4 for remote working success: Mix and match...

It may be a good idea to introduce partial remote-working practices across the company, either formally or informally. This is great for work-life balance initiatives too.

Someone may have to wait at home for a parcel to arrive, or they may have other commitments close to home that come up at short notice. It's good for team morale if employees have the option to work at home on an ad-hoc basis.

Similarly, this can be formalised in employee contracts, whereby they work from home two days a week and are in the office for three. These days can be decided on a week-by-week basis to suit their personal and professional circumstances at the time.

Tip 5 for home-based business success: Communications...

Good communication is at the heart of any successful venture. With remote working, the need to optimise and streamline communications is even more so. If you can't tap a colleague on the shoulder to ask a question, or have an impromptu brainstorming meeting in the canteen, then alternative mechanisms must be in place to ensure communication doesn't breakdown. And this is where technology comes into play...

Successful home working top 6: Technology at home...

Technology: the core, underpinning facet of 21st century remote-working. So what equipment should a home-worker have at their disposal? Well the very basics would have to be a high-spec laptop/desktop computer and a high-speed broadband internet connection. But that in itself isn't always enough.

Communication channels must be opened up to replicate real-life meeting spaces as much as possible. First of all, all remote-working employees must have access to a teleconferencing service, where 3 or more people can dial-in and talk to each other in real time. This can't match a physical meeting room though and full collaboration only becomes a possibility when everyone can see the same things.

Most people will be familiar with Microsoft Office. But this doesn't really allow real-time collaboration, which is where Google Docs comes into play. Free to use, people can chat on a

teleconferencing service whilst accessing the same textual information as each other, with all edits updating on all screens instantly.

It's perhaps also worth using a service like Skype. Again, this is free to use and its in-built instant messaging service is useful for sending files or requesting information. It also has a very useful video-conferencing facility built-in which is good for one-on-one, face to face chats. Seeing really is believing...

Remote working tip 7: Technology in the hand...

Remote working doesn't necessarily have to mean 'home-working' (although it often does...). Some roles require a person to travel around the country - or even further afield.

Whether you're an Apple aficionado or a BlackBerry buff, your portable technology will help make a remote working life on the move a whole lot easier. A small, light laptop will help, whilst a portable handheld device such as a PDA or SmartPhone will mean everyone is in the loop at all times...

Happy working!

About the author

Christian Arno is founder and Managing Director of [Lingo24](#), a UK translation company with over 4,000 freelance translators and a significant number of full-time home-based employees. Lingo24 has 120 full-time employees on four continents and had a turnover of £3.65m in 2009.