

The Ultimate Small Business Guide to Setting Up A 'Work from Home' Or Remote Network Access System for Your Staff

Critical Facts and Insider Secrets Every Business Owner
Must Know Before Installing A 'Virtual Network' To
Allow Employees to Work from Home, On The Road, Or
from A Remote Office

If you are the owner of a small or medium sized business that is thinking about implementing a “work from home” program for your employees – or if you want to install a virtual network to enable you and certain key employees and managers to work on the road or from a remote office, please read this guide.

This report will explain in plain, non-technical terms best practices for setting up remote access for you and your staff, as well important questions you should ask any computer consultant to avoid making the most commonly made, costly mistakes made when setting up the technology for a work from home program.

You'll Discover:

- What “telecommuting” is and why so many small and medium sized businesses are rapidly implementing work from home programs.
- The single most important thing you **MUST** have in place before starting any work from home or remote office initiative.
- How one company saved \$11 million after implementing a work from home program – and how you implement the same money-saving strategies for your small business.
- How one company slashed its turnover rate from 33% to nearly 0% – and increased productivity by 18% - all by implementing a “work from home” program.



- 8 CRITICAL *characteristics you should absolutely demand* from any IT professional you're considering to setup your remote office technology; don't trust your infrastructure to anyone who does not meet these criteria.

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, in fact, Parallel Edge has been a “Virtual” company since its inception in 2006, recent advancements in remote access technology and security have made it very affordable and easy for even micro to large 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.” Parallel Edge did it to save on overhead of a “Brick and Mortar” office, 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 all in on 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.

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? We'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, Tablets, 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.

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 monitoring 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.

Home Office Action Pack



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Telecommuting Employee Agreement

The following constitutes an agreement between [Your Business] and [Employee].

[Employee] agrees to participate in the telecommuting program and to adhere to the applicable guidelines and policies. [Your Business] concurs with the employee's participation and agrees to adhere to the applicable guidelines and policies.

Terms and conditions. The telecommuting agreement is subject to the following terms and conditions:

Duration. This agreement will be valid for a period of [specify term] beginning on [start date] and ending on [end date]. At the end of that time, both parties will participate in a review which can result in the continuation, termination or revision of the agreement.

Work hours. Employee's work hours and work location are specified in the Attachment at the end of this agreement.

Pay and attendance. All pay, leave and travel entitlement will be based on the employee's primary business location. Employee's time and attendance will be recorded as performing official duties at the primary business location.

Leave. Employees must obtain approval before taking leave in accordance with established office procedures. By signing this form, employee agrees to follow established procedures for requesting and obtaining approval of leave.

Overtime. The employee will continue to work in pay status while working at the home office. An employee who works overtime that has been ordered and approved in advance will be compensated in accordance with applicable law and rules. The employee understands that [Your Business] will not accept the results of unapproved overtime work and will act vigorously to discourage it.

By signing this agreement, the employee agrees that failing to obtain proper approval for overtime work may result in removal from the telecommuting program or other appropriate action.

Inspection. The telecommuting location will be inspected periodically to ensure that proper maintenance of [Your Business] equipment is performed, and that safety standards are met. Notice must be given to the employee at least 24 hours in advance of the inspection, which must



occur during normal working hours.

Liability. [Your Business] will not be liable for damages to the employees' property that result from participation in the telecommuting program.

Reimbursement. [Your Business] will not be responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, or any other incidental cost (e.g., utilities) whatsoever, associated with the use of the employee's residence. The employee does not relinquish any entitlement to reimbursement for authorized expenses incurred while conducting business for [Your Business].

Workers' Compensation. The employee is covered under the Workers' Compensation Law if injured in the course of performing official duties at the telecommuting location.

Work assignments. The employee will meet with [designate contact person] to receive assignments and to review completed work as necessary or appropriate. The employee will complete all assigned work according to work procedures mutually agreed upon by the employee and [the contact person] according to guidelines and standards stated in the employee's performance plan.

Employee evaluation. The evaluation of the employee's job performance will be based on norms or other criteria derived from past performance and occupational standards consistent with these guidelines. For those assignments without precedent or without standards, regular and required progress reporting by the employee will be used to rate job performance and establish standards. The employee's most recent performance appraisal must indicate fully achieved standards.

Records. The employee will apply approved safeguards to protect [Your Business] records from unauthorized disclosure or damage. Work done at the telecommuting location is considered [Your Business] business. All records, papers, computer files, and correspondence must be safeguarded for their return to the primary business location.

Curtailed of the agreement. [Specify whether the employee may continue working for your business if the employee no longer wishes to telecommute. Also specify the circumstances under which the telecommuting agreement will be terminated by your business (e.g., if continued participation fails to satisfy business needs) and the consequences of that termination on the worker's continued employment.]

Performance location. The employee agrees to limit performance of assigned duties to the primary business location or to the approved home location. Failure to comply with this provision may result in termination of the telecommuting agreement and/or other appropriate disciplinary action.



Employee: _____ Date: _____

[Officer of Your Company]: _____ Date: _____



Attachment

The following hours and locations are agreed to in support of the Telecommuting Agreement.

Primary Business Location: _____

Telecommuting Location: _____

General Work Hours:

Day	Hours	Location (home, office, other)
Monday:	_____ - _____	_____
Tuesday:	_____ - _____	_____
Wednesday:	_____ - _____	_____
Thursday:	_____ - _____	_____
Friday:	_____ - _____	_____
Saturday:	_____ - _____	_____
Sunday:	_____ - _____	_____



Comments (Schedule flexibility, etc.):

Signatures:

[Your Name]: _____

Date: _____

Employee: _____

Date: _____

Employee Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____



EMPLOYEE EQUIPMENT ISSUE AGREEMENT

This agreement is made this _____ day of _____, 200__, between [YOUR COMPANY] (Employer) and _____ (Employee).

In order to effectively perform their assigned tasks, Employee may use [YOUR COMPANY'S] equipment, as outlined below, at the telecommuting location with the approval of [EMPLOYEE'S MANAGER]. Such equipment must be protected against damage and unauthorized use. [YOUR COMPANY'S] owned equipment will be serviced and maintained by [YOUR COMPANY]. Any equipment outside of the equipment outlined below and used by the employee will be at no cost to [YOUR COMPANY], and will be maintained by the employee.

[YOUR COMPANY] agrees to provide the following described property to Employee, while Employee is in employment of [YOUR COMPANY]. In consideration of the use of this property at no cost of Employee, Employee assumes the risk of and shall be responsible for any loss or damage to the property specific to this agreement. In the case of loss, Employee shall be liable for not more than the actual original purchase amount of the property. In the case of damage, the Employee shall be not be liable for more than the cost of repair of the property or replacement with comparable materials.

Employee agrees to return the issued property, all or in part, to Employer upon demand of Employee's Manger or any officer of [YOUR COMPANY]. The time frame shall be immediate, if the property is immediately accessible to the Employee or the next day from the time of notification by the Manager.

In case of loss, damage or failure to return product upon request, the Employee authorizes [YOUR COMPANY] to deduct an amount specific to the total loss and/or repair of the product from Employee's paycheck. Should there remain a balance due after deductions have been made; Employee agrees to pay [YOUR COMPANY] the balance due. Should the Employee refuse to pay Employer for any balance due, Employer has the right to collect the balance through the Municipal Courts of the County [YOUR COUNTY]. The Courts ruling in favor of the Employer in any dispute of balance due, the Employee shall be responsible for all attorneys' fees, collection fees and Court costs.



DESCRIPTION OF PRODUCT ISSUED:

Item Serial Number Qty Extended Price

Employee: _____ Date: _____

[Officer of Your Company]: _____ Date: _____