



## Business Briefing

### **The Remote Worker: Are You Ready to Make Telework Effective in Your Company?**

“The devil’s in the details” is an apt reminder that solid plans and preparation are required to effectively support Remote Workers as they shift to a teleworker role—one that greatly benefits any company in these days of sky-rocketing oil prices and clear employee preference.

## Reader Highlights

- Top employees favor working remotely over other incentives
- Tips for Remote Worker Readiness
- Handy Telework Resources

### **Trends Suggest that Telework is Attractive and Growing**

Communications News ([www.comnews.com](http://www.comnews.com)) reports a recent survey of key business trends showing that private-sector employers are taking significant steps to expand telecommuting initiatives this year (2008). Private-sector telecommuting adoption is now approaching the federal level, with an estimated 15 percent of private-sector employees telecommuting, compared with 17 percent of federal employees.

A survey by CDW, a provider of technology products and services, shows that 76 percent of private-sector employers now provide technical support for remote workers, up 27 percentage points over 2007.

The survey by Korn/Ferry shows that 31% of large companies offer telecommuting — and when asked whether the rising cost of gas prices would lead to expanded telecommuting programs, found a different statistic on telecommuting. The respondents say that they plan to up their number of telecommuters by as much as 25 to 30 percent.

Key Employees are showing a clear preference for the Remote Worker option. In a recent survey by The Polling Company, the ability to work remotely was more highly valued by respondents than stock options and onsite child care.

So, small business or large, it’s time to institute a Telework Program. With the right program and the right technology in place, your business can reap considerable benefits.

### **Remote Worker Readiness—What Does It Take?**

Regardless of the position, it is important that your remote worker can perform the majority of their job functions via a computer and the telephone.

There are a some essentials to consider when preparing to support your Remote Workers in their Telework program. We think of "Remote Worker Readiness" in two separate but highly aligned categories: Business Preparation and Technology Preparation.

### **Business Preparation**

These key questions will help you begin to effectively prepare a success program.

- Have the Manager and Remote Worker looked at the tradeoffs for working remotely?
- What are the benefits the company wants to derive?
- What are the benefits the Remote Worker wants to derive?
- Has the company/department participated in a tele-work program before?
- Is there a "business case" documenting the value of a remote worker program?
- Is there documentation in place about how the program will work?
- Will there be a "trial period" and for how long?
- What metrics will be used and what constitutes success?
- How often—and under what circumstances —will the Remote Worker come to the office?

### **Technology Preparation**

Your Remote Workers may play a wide variety of roles in your organization—from sales to customer support—yet all of them need similar technology support. Here are some key questions to help you prepare:

Is Your Office Network Ready? Do you have an office network in place that connects your workstations, printers, Internet connection, and possibly a server?

Is Your Business Telephone System Ready? Does your telephone system allow calls to be forwarded to remote numbers? Does your telephone system do call routing, simultaneous ring, or find me / follow me functions?

Is Your Remote Office Location Ready? Does the location have high speed internet access such as cable, DSL, or wireless broadband?

Is there a Virtual Private Network (VPN) in place? Is special software available for the Remote Office Location to enable communication with network servers and specific platforms like mainframe, UNIX, FTP servers, etc.? Will there be specifications on what operating systems may be used in the Remote Office Location such as Vista versus XP or Mac?

What about helpdesk support? And, guidelines for anti-virus protection and security?

## **Remote Worker and Telework Resources**

Jack Nilles, considered to be the "father of telecommuting" has authored a number of books designed for those who develop and manage telework programs . Check Amazon for his books and Google for more about his contributions.

The Telework Coalition  
(<http://www.telcoa.org/>)

Is a resource rich provider of information ranging from tracking of Federal legislation to helpful hints on supporting Remote Workers.

A Telework Program for Your Small Business: The Why and the How  
By Brandi Cummings

Practical coaching and how-to suggestions for starting your program

(<http://small-business-management.bestmanagementarticles.com/Article.aspx?id=13100>)

## **Experience and Expertise Help**

Utilizing the proven experience and highly developed expertise of those who are knowledgeable about Telework requirements will help to ensure the most effective Remote Worker performance.

Thinking through your business and technology needs may best be accomplished with the help of an outside advisor—one who can be a dependable long-term partner. A good advisor will help you to identify success factors that you may inadvertently overlook. They can also connect you to other companies that have “walked the road before you” and provide you with the benefit of their own experience.

Fortunately the costs for the essential technologies to support your Remote Worker program have come down significantly in the last few years. VPN (virtual private networking), for instance, allows you to have a private network across the public internet which is an invaluable asset to help integrate people, process and technology, thus assuring the success of your program. This technology used to be expensive and difficult to configure – allowing only large companies to benefit from it. Now VPN is a very affordable solution for businesses of all sizes and small-to-mid-sized companies are taking advantage of this change.

The majority of telephone systems in place today perform remote call forward. This means that if a call is transferred to a particular extension, the system will send the call to another number such as the home office number. Many more modern systems allow you to intelligently route calls to a number of destinations – to make sure the calls get answered and to accommodate a distributed workforce.

With Telework programs on the rise and the cost of the business-enabling technology falling, this may be the best of all times to offer your key employees a Remote Worker option. At minimum, we encourage you to investigate what a program would require for your business– and the benefit you may see in your bottom line.

By the way, almost everyone here at Medlin Communications participates as a remote worker at some level. We all access our dispatch, proposal generators, and email/integrated messaging servers remotely when working from home and/or other remote locations. We believe this flexibility makes our business better and we are advocates of telework programs.

## **Do You Have Questions About Preparing For Effective Remote Worker Support?**

Contact us—we can help you get started quickly and effectively.

## **About Medlin Communications**

Founded, in 1989, Medlin is a leading provider of business communications and low-voltage electrical services. The company’s extensive experience and proven approach to delivering high quality services and solutions has enabled it to enjoy consistently high satisfaction ratings. Specializing in the unique needs of cross-industry SMB companies and national retailers with company owned stores, Medlin is known for establishing long-term partnership with its clients, delivering on their voice and data integration and cabling requirements, and providing high-value related services.

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