

Virtual capabilities

How a remote work force can be your ticket to success **Interviewed by Troy Sympson**

No one can argue that technology has changed the way we do business. We can now accomplish more tasks, from more places, than we ever could before. Technology has not only changed the way we work, it's also changed where we work.

A big aspect of this is the emergence of the remote work force. Although you may be wary of a remote work force, fearing that your employees' productivity will dip, it can offer many significant rewards, including reduced expenses and decreased attrition. Not only that, a remote work force can actually improve productivity.

Besides the business benefits, a remote work force will reduce your utility costs and make your company greener. By implementing a few procedures and processes, you can quickly and easily improve both your economy and the ecology.

"Remote work forces have already become an integral part of many U.S. companies," says Monty Ferdowski, the president of Broadcore. "There are many benefits for allowing your staff to work virtually anywhere and anytime."

Smart Business spoke with Ferdowski about remote work forces and how they can save you time and money and enhance your business.

How can virtual solutions create efficiencies for telecommuters?

In early 1990s, the concept of telecommuting surfaced, promising to virtualize the work force via the use of new telecommunications technologies by allowing employees to work from home. At the time, however, it was just a concept, as the technologies required to easily implement the solutions were not readily available or matured enough to allow for companies to easily and cost-effectively implement telecommuting.

Today, though, with the advent of many technologies, including abundant broadband connectivity services (DSL, cable and wireless), remote access to corporate networks (Citrix and MS Terminal services) and a well-matured voice over IP (VoIP), it is now possible for companies to reap the many benefits of implementing telecommuting.

Many companies have already come to realize these benefits, and in the



Monty Ferdowski
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last few years, they have implemented capabilities to allow their staffs to use telecommuting on a per-employee basis, wherever and whenever it makes sense. Of course, with any disruptive and innovative technologies, there will be some companies that hesitate to embrace them, but with a well-planned implementation strategy, most concerns can be overcome. There are many success stories and case studies that would allow companies to see how other organizations have benefited using virtual technologies for their work forces.

In this environment, what kinds of advanced virtual capabilities can benefit businesses?

Allowing employees to telecommute enables companies to tap into a much larger pool of skilled workers, well beyond the geographical boundaries of the company's physical office(s). Organizations will also be able to retain skilled and valued employees when someone needs to move to a city or state that's not within driving distance of the corporate office. Studies also have shown that allowing telecommuting on a full-time or part-time basis will increase employee morale, since employees see several per-

sonal benefits of telecommuting, including reduced or no travel time, reduced costs associated with transportation and flexible working hours.

How can remote work forces save businesses money?

There are several cost savings to be had when you use virtual capabilities to implement remote work forces, including a need for a smaller office space and savings in many of the general costs associated with housing staff in the corporate office (furniture, electricity, etc.). Implementing telecommuting on either a full-time and part-time basis can also mitigate the need for a growing company to move its office location, which can be a major task with many related costs.

What technologies are needed to implement a remote work force?

Today, the virtual technologies needed to create virtual work forces are readily available, however, it is imperative for companies to evaluate all the solutions available in order to receive the most optimized services. In general, there are two categories of services that need to be virtualized to extend telecommuting to employees: remote desktop connectivity to the corporate network and voice connectivity to the corporate telephone system.

There are several technologies for remotely connecting employees to corporate network, including Citrix and Microsoft Terminal Services. These technologies have matured and are relatively simple and inexpensive to implement. Voice connectivity is, however, a bit more complicated. Establishing remote connection to a corporate telephone system is no small feat. Luckily, in the last several years, hosted telephony services (Hosted PBX) has greatly reduced both the cost and complexity of implementing a virtual telephone system, allowing a corporate telephone to be extended to a remote telecommuting work force. <<

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