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Home stretch

Executives find little fallout from working at home

Nashville Business Journal - June 17, 2005 by [Michael Stuhreyer](#) Special to the Nashville Business Journal[Print this Article](#) [Email this Article](#) [Reprints](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [★ Most Viewed](#) [★ Most Emailed](#)

Blending home life and the work place can be a tricky prospect, with one of the top concerns being whether prospective clients will couple a lack of office space with a lack of credibility.

For those who by choice or by necessity have traded cubicles for the convenience of working where they live - as well as the challenge of living where they work - acceptance has largely replaced the stigma once attached to business enterprises run from the home.

Hays Waldrop started the **Institute of Healthcare Executives and Suppliers**, a health care consulting firm, from his home office over three years ago. IHES works with hospital system CEOs throughout the country to conduct focus groups for health care suppliers.

"Initially, I thought there would be that stigma; that I might be viewed as something less than what I am, but I haven't seen that," says Waldrop. "I deal with some of the largest companies in the United States - \$50 billion companies - and they don't think twice about it."

"Telecommuting" or "teleworking" is a trend that began in earnest about 15 years ago, and now an ever-increasing number of telecommuters - be they entrepreneurs operating one-person consulting firms or executives with Fortune 500 companies - are doing complex business across town and across time zones, all within a few strides of their living rooms.

In the corporate world, this "quiet revolution," as some industry analysts call it, is shifting long-held paradigms relating to employee productivity and the workplace.

"They (clients) understand technology has facilitated work at home, allowing me to be more productive than I could be in an office environment," says Jim Sparks, a public relations and marketing consultant who operates his business from home.

Technology is indeed the driving force in telecommuting. Large multi-nationals and sole proprietors alike exploit technologies not dreamed of 20 years ago, replacing centralization with virtual meetings and real-time collaboration. What differentiates the two groups is the level of technological sophistication they require.

Generally, an independent consultant working from home requires only a few standard tools - high-speed internet access, a fax, a copier and a telephone.

"Technology has rendered location moot," says Sparks, who houses all the technology he needs in a computer armoire that transforms into another piece of household furniture at day's end.

It gets a little more complicated for corporate telecommuters, particularly those who work within designated teams and maintain a high level of business continuity, regardless of their geography. They require secure access to intranet, e-mail, networks, directories and business applications.

With the proper tools, the team atmosphere can be maintained while allowing workers to operate on a flexible schedule.

"I'm very fortunate, because we have one of the most sophisticated corporate networks in the world," says Valerie Oliver, manager of global employee communications for **Nortel**. "We have access to all the latest products and services, which allow us to work remotely yet give us a sense of presence."

Oliver, a former managing editor for the Nashville Business Journal, edits Nortel's intra-company news service, which provides 32,000 Nortel employees worldwide with corporate news updates via the company's intranet.

Revolutionary technologies and evolutions in attitude make telecommuting not only an option, but perhaps the best option for many professionals.

"I hit the keyboard at six o'clock this morning," Oliver says. "I'm an early bird and my energy level is higher in the morning. Being able to get that early start is one major advantage to working from home."

She enjoys the flex time working from home provides, because it allows her to take advantage of her personal productivity cycles throughout the day and because her job knows no time zone.

"The business day in Europe is well underway at 6 a.m. Nashville time, so I've got requests to post or write stories coming in from Europe or coming in overnight from Asia," she says. "I can start my day early, without wasting time in traffic or worrying about what I'm going to wear."

A veteran of teleworking concepts for more than 10 years, Nortel enables approximately 65 percent of its employees to work either full-time or part-time from a location other than a traditional office. During that time, the company has measured a 15 percent increase in employee productivity, Oliver says.

Oliver is one of 8 percent of Nortel employees who work remotely on a permanent, full-time basis.

Twenty years has made a difference, says Sparks, who adds that had the business climate not changed, his home office would never have been a reality.

"I wouldn't think of having a home office back then," he says. "I was just starting out, and popular wisdom said that working from home cost you credibility and marked you as less serious about your business."

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