

Virtual Office is a Reality

Save time and money in the Information Age

By Thomas Lynch

Imagine waking in the morning and stepping out of your bedroom and into your office—a room in the comfort and privacy of your own home that still retains the immediate connection to co-workers provided by an office.

Or maybe you want to take your laptop computer and lounge in the backyard.

It's possible.

With a computer and modem all of the day's work can be conducted from home—saving your business valuable time and money.

The technological achievements of the information age allow business professionals to 'telecommute' to work from a 'virtual office' at home or any location.

Issues such as child care, illness or other cases that occasionally force people to remain at home become less of a problem. In fact, the telecommuter is no farther away from the "office" and can return to work much faster than a commuter.

Commuting, for the telecommuter, is reduced to stepping up to a home computer and turning it on.

Telecommuting employees increase a business' productivity. When tardiness and absenteeism is no longer a problem, work gets accomplished in a more timely manner.

However, the virtual office can save money in more direct ways as well. With a large percentage of the employees working at home, it is no longer necessary to provide office space to accommodate everybody on the payroll.

Floor space requirements are drastically reduced when a company only needs a few permanent people in an office and possibly a rotating staff that spends time both in and out of the office. A company can downsize by renting out or selling office space that is no longer needed. Plus, the daily costs of running a building (heating, electricity, etc.) are reduced.

Optimal Way to do Business

Continuing innovations in wireless data transmission, lower cost laptop computers and high-speed modems make teleworking not only feasible, but an optimal way for professionals to do business. The virtual office resides in each teleworkers' computer that maintains a connection to the job through a dedicated phone line. Each morning employees sign on and connect to the corporate computer and perform their daily work. Their work activities can then be tracked by reports and logs.

Any task normally performed in an office can be accomplished online. Communication occurs through the telephone or through the computer.

Computers can receive electronic mail and faxes, and even handle video conferencing with multiple remote users. Plus, new innovations in wireless Internet connectivity allow workers to have remote access.

Computers can store all of a company's files, which are then retrievable from any virtual office.

Some companies already have begun taking advantage of current technology and discovering the merits of the virtual office.

Showing a commitment to exploring the benefits of the virtual office, AT&T declared Sept. 20, 1994, the "AT&T Telecommuting Day" and sent thousands of its employees home to do their jobs.

AT&T is also a founding member of Telecommute America!, the first nationwide program to accelerate telecommuting and other nontraditional work arrangements. A joint effort of government, nonprofit and corporate entities encouraged U.S. workers to try teleworking during the week of Oct. 23, 1995. The week, called "Telecommute America! Discover a New Workplace," highlighted a variety of alternative work styles.

One of the first companies to enact a formal telecommuting policy, AT&T is committed to supporting and encouraging telecommuters.

AT&T has about 123,000 U.S. managers and expects half to experience "teleworking" by the year 2000.

For more information on telecommuting and the virtual office, visit AT&T's telecommuting webpage: http://www.att.com/telecommute_america. 

