

Technology and flexible working

With many people now expecting to be able to work flexibly to some degree, SMEs need to utilise technology to offer more agile solutions.

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Some futurists predict that eventually humans won't work, as computers learn to programme themselves. A permanent holiday might sound attractive but, for now, people must continue to share the load.

Fortunately, the increasing use of technology in the workplace has made it possible for small business owners to improve the work environment of their employees as well as achieving economic benefits themselves.

Cloud based technology and online interfaces make it possible for many tasks to be performed from anywhere.

Multi-factor authentication methods using mobile technology, whilst easy to use and straightforward to implement, validate the user's right to access systems and information, and add another layer of security.

Work can still be performed collaboratively and does not require expensive installation costs as most of the storage is handled by remote servers. Simple solutions include the use of screen sharing and video conference calls, use of instant messaging tools which reduce e-mail traffic and live shared document editing.

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Flexible working options

Employees can work flexibly balancing other life choices around their job, meaning they can manage childcare, spend time abroad or choose to live in places that suit their lifestyle. Flexible working options include:

- Working from home or remotely: The ability to access internal systems by logging on from another device
- Compressed hours: Working contracted full-time hours but over fewer days
- Flexitime: Working core hours but with the ability to flex the start and end time
- Annualised hours: Working a set number of hours over the year with flexibility to choose when these hours are worked
- Phased retirement: The reduction of hours worked as someone approaches retirement

The variable working patterns allow tasks to be completed outside the traditional five-day, nine to five working week. This can lead to less work-related stress and an enhanced work-life balance, as more time is spent at home or with the family, rather than on packed train carriages or motorways, and more money as travel costs are reduced.

Benefits of utilising technology

Business owners are advantaged too by enabling flexible working, as the talent pool from which to build a workforce is greatly enhanced by not limiting it simply to those who are most able to be at a fixed location for fixed hours of the week.

This can have a positive impact on revenues and costs are reduced by less need for office space and creating a culture whereby issues are resolved using technology. For example, transport costs are reduced because staff are making journeys for meetings less often and time can be spent more valuably away from an office environment full of distractions.

Managing a remote workforce requires appropriately crafted management tools to ensure that responsibilities are understood, allocated and delivered at an agreed time.

Engaging employees

Employees who work away from the office need to feel included as well and it is therefore important to celebrate their successes with the whole team and ensure key messages are made available through a shared intranet site or newsletters.

Cloud based management solutions can also incorporate time management, such as clocking-in tools, and track employee locations giving comfort that flexible work is also diligent and effective.

Many people now expect to be able to work flexibly to some degree, and increasingly they are looking for opportunities that allow them complete autonomy over where and when they work.

Attracting and maintaining a high quality workforce that is motivated is a key deliverable for many business owners and therefore facilitating a shift to flexible working, so far as it is practical within the employee's job specification, is crucial.



Enabling Change

As every year passes, the pace of change increases immeasurably. Seemingly well-established businesses can, with a sudden change of events, be prone to factors that can threaten their very existence. Yet such changes can provide agile and responsive businesses with considerable opportunity.

The real skill is balancing the competing demands on their time and energy, while enabling the business leadership to allow these changes to add value to the business, not simply viewing them as hurdles to overcome.

For more insights on Enabling Change, please visit our website [here](#).



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