

Remote Teleworking is coming: Are you ready?

A joint survey performed in 2004 by AT&T and the Economist Intelligence Unit showed that 81% of executives viewed remote access to their corporate network as a "critical" or "important" goal. The study projected that 79% of companies would be employing VoIP for remote working in 2006, due to the robust functionality that VoIP offered for remote workers as compared to a PBX-based system.

Remote Teleworking can dramatically lower your operational and physical infrastructure expenses, and substantially increase the productivity of your employees. The question is what do you need to do in order to ensure that remote employees can access the full functionality of your in-office phone system without sacrificing speed or voice quality?

Criteria for Success

The answer lies in the selection of the right technology to seamlessly integrate with your current network through an employee's existing IP connection, whether through DSL, cable modem or other remote access device. With the proper PBX gateway, you should be able to extend all the features of your corporate system over a single circuit or packet network. This gateway should be highly configurable, with the ability to operate in a managed IP, or point-to-point synchronous WAN environment. You should be able to employ a fully-converged voice and data network, and need only one system administrator to monitor the entire package.

Other abilities to look for in your remote technology platforms include echo cancellation and noise detection algorithms to improve voice quality. Your echo canceller should be G.165 compliant to guarantee Quality of Service (QoS). You should have your choice of voice compression algorithms, including G.729A (8 Kbps), and G.711 (64 Kbps PCM). If you spend the proper diligence in selecting your equipment vendor, all of the above should be possible.

Planning is Key

Before planning your network implementation strategy, you should carry out an audit to determine the jobs that are best suited for this type of operating environment. You should consult all departmental managers, HR, IT and facilities management in building your action plan. Corporate-wide participation is an essential component in making a remote operating strategy successful.

By employing the right technology, along with a solid remote teleworking strategy, you can deliver a robust, cost-effective network to your organization. Ideally, remote employees should see little to no difference between the office and their homes. One step we recommend is to offer financing for the home office equipment for the employee and to cover DSL or other connection charges. Besides the obvious morale benefits, this will keep you in control of what equipment is being used to access your network. We also advise setting up a virtual private network (VPN) to ensure security.



Potential Rewards

If you put a teleworking process into place, what kind of benefits can you expect? Look at the example of AT&T: This telecommunications giant has reported \$180 million in yearly operational savings from deploying a teleworking workforce. This figure breaks out roughly to \$148 million in increased productivity and \$34 million in real estate savings. The number of AT&T managers who telework full time actually doubled from 2001 to 2003. Massive organizations like AT&T and small companies alike are all starting to realize the competitive advantages that teleworking can offer. It's all a matter of combining the right technology with the right strategy to make it happen.