

HOME WORKING



With a variety of pressures such as office costs, pollution and worsening travel conditions, it comes as no surprise that the idea of flexible working is becoming ever more increasingly popular. Reduced stress and travelling time, greater freedom to balance work and home demands and control of working lives are just a few of the many benefits. But the company also gains by saving on office and employee overheads and by being able to retain a wider pool of skilled workers by maximising available labour.

We take a look at just what's available to the home-worker, let you know why this trend is kicking off and tell you exactly how to go about promoting home-office equipment.

One company that has recognized the tremendous benefits of working from home is Acco. European category manager, plastics, Steve Keen, says, "Acco has conducted extensive research into the needs of the consumer, particularly with regard to home working and changing work priorities. It is estimated, for example, that most workers spend less than half their working day actually sitting at their desk and the products they use must allow for this increased mobility."

Mike Patterson, marketing director, Esselte, predicts that where people will

We look into the latest products designed to let you and, more importantly, your clients, work from home. It's all the rage you know!

BY KNEEZ BUKHARI



be able to purchase from will become increasingly important when they set up a home office. He says, "These 'new' consumers increasingly want to work smarter and not harder so they specify innovative products that help them to be more organised. This has clear implications on the mix of products that the trade sells. The growth in commodity items, such as traditional files and soft plastic will remain static, but products such as labelmakers, computer accessories, binders and laminators and desktop accessories will grow."

It is a recognised fact that technology is impacting on people's working lives and no more so than at home with access to broadband etc. It is important that the reseller understands that where there is a PC, there is a workspace. And wherever there is a workspace, whether it is a separate home office, a living room or bedroom, there is a need for a range of desk top products. The challenge is for the manufacturer to develop products which match the consumer's lifestyle and environment and brands which equate with design, innovation and quality.

Apart from the physical storage of data, a home office also needs to be able to print this data. There are several printing options to consider. While a laser printer is an ideal purchase for high quality, higher volume/workgroup printing, all-in-ones combine the functionality of several different pieces of office equipment into a single

machine for the desktop. They can include a printer, scanner and copier. They also require a lower initial cost outlay when compared to buying individual pieces of office equipment and the space requirement in the office is also greatly reduced by choosing a multi-function device.

Commenting on the survey findings, Robert Clark, EPSON Europe's head of consumer products, said: "One of the key contributors to the future success of home working is clearly about individuals being able to perform at office level standards. If they can't, their aspirations for a more stress-free environment will quickly be shattered."

Panasonic comments that homeworkers need to make sure they have the right equipment to function properly and, with space often a constraint, new innovations offering several different administration functions need to be considered. Desktop devices that would normally require you to purchase three or four different pieces of equipment can help save space in a home office environment that is likely to be small and cluttered.

Another aspect that needs to be taken seriously is security of the home office and the possibility of identity theft and corporate cloning, especially for companies that hold confidentiality clauses and are particularly information sensitive. Electronic security issues can be solved with devices such as iris recognition systems, which eliminate the

need for passwords. Craig Boulter of HSM adds that identity theft and corporate cloning, the stealing of a company or organisations' identity, is a real concern, since the risk of company documents falling into the wrong hands via domestic waste is very high. Boulter suggests that companies should consider providing appropriate staff who work at home with a suitable shredder or, alternatively, insist that all sensitive documents are returned to the office for shredding. "This is an opportunity for dealers," Boulter says, "They should be asking their customer how many of their staff work at home, alerting them to the risks and asking what security provisions are in place. Suitable shredders can then be recommended."

Boulter adds that from a personal prospective, working at home has many benefits, and says, "If I have a project or proposal to complete then the opportunity to work without distractions is invaluable." Paul Taylor, sales and marketing director for IP telephony company, Swyx Solutions, agrees, saying, "The normal office commute can greatly erode quality of life, RAC stats reveal the average London commute takes around three hours! Teleworking can provide a practical alternative." Taylor supports home working as it, "Creates a win/win situation for both parties – employer and employee. Businesses can reduce overheads such as office space (up to third according to business pundits) and improve

staff productivity through more flexible working."

While people may be more productive at home, there is also a greater need for discipline. It is important to allocate strict working hours and achieve a work/home balance; the feeling of being part of a company is important and separating work life from home can be a problem (i.e. working really long hours, or even getting into a habit of working irregular hours to suit your home needs). It is important to have a dedicated space in order to successfully make the transition between office and home work.

Although home working presents a veritable cornucopia of sales opportunities, the impact that the trend is having back in the office should not be ignored. More and more offices are deciding to hot-desk employees who work primarily from home, thus maximising office space and minimising cost. Bisley, who have a range of storage solutions for this purpose, says that assigning temporary storage solutions to workers enables workers to be integrated into desk sharing schemes, ultimately saving the company money. Bisley's marketing manager, Gary Carr, says, "When remote workers do come into the office for necessary meetings etc, there shouldn't be any barriers to office working."

The advantages to working from home are obvious, as is the selling potential. People are catching on to this growing phenomenon fast – so, don't get left behind! ■

With the UK spending more time commuting to work than any other country it comes as no surprise that the idea of flexible working is becoming ever more increasingly popular. Home workers need to make sure they have the right equipment to function properly. Panasonic's small, versatile "Mini Office", offers six functions in one space-saving desktop device, providing everything needed to create and distribute hard copy documents, including a printer, copier, scanner and fax.