

## Working Remotely from Various Locations: Technical Preparations 101

Working remotely in teams that can be scattered all over the globe is on the rise – and justifiably so. No need to pay rent for office space, employees are flexible and can contribute to the success of the company from anywhere. It's a trend with added value, even for small and medium-sized businesses, as well as, start-ups.

### Employees Working from Home are More Productive

UC Point has experience in working with remote teams and can recommend this approach with a clear conscience. The employees of the Microsoft Lync support provider are spread out in different locations all over the world. In fact, 98 per cent of their IT specialists either work from home or travelling to and from customer sites. The company's motto is: "We employ the best people we can get, regardless of where they live."

Many managers still prefer their employees to work in a local office – however, wrongly so. In fact, employees are more productive when you let them work where they feel most comfortable. And the technical preparations necessary for this are manageable. Moreover, there are now more and more inexpensive and easy-to-use tools that can be used to quickly develop an efficient infrastructure for remote work. Whether it's OfficeSuite, CRM or Planning, there is software available in almost every field that supports teams collaborating from different locations.



Source: Shutterstock, EDHAR  
Colleagues in virtual teams must also be able to communicate with each other despite being in various time zones.

### Being Well-Prepared is Only Half the Story

Before a general manager decides for or against remote work, it is essential to consider the available information and weigh all the options. This includes country-specific technical requirements, as well as, the headquarters' guidelines for IT and Human Resources.

If a company is seeking to operate "virtually" from several locations around the world, there are a few things to consider: Take, for instance, the differences in plugs and outlets for local power supply. Everyone who has travelled for leisure or business has encountered this problem when trying

to operate technical equipment or just recharge it. Having the right adapter on-hand saves a lot of trouble. From a company's point of view, it is economically essential to ensure electronic equipment operates using the local power supply and is equipped with compatible plugs. If the staff's technical equipment is organized centrally, then import and export conditions will now play an important role. Russia, for example, requires additional formalities to clear customs in Europe and Asia.

### Just Telephone Calls or Full Connectivity?

When operating a classic telecommunications system worldwide, it's important to know that there are differences in the standards of data transfer between Europe and the USA. Since 1994, there has been a uniform system (EURO-ISDN) throughout Europe. The data transfer occurs in the D-channel. In the USA, however, the national standard ISDN-I is used. Due to another coding which occurs in the B-channel, only 56 Kbits/s are reached during the data transfer. In order for there to be no unpleasant interference in the communication between participants, it is necessary to integrate an additional network terminating unit – a connection device with two ISDN sockets. With that, there are two bearer channels (B-channels) on the ISDN base terminal with an output of 64 Kbit/s for the transfer of data and a D-channel to transmit the data.

Today, however, many small and medium-sized businesses are more inclined to consider virtual telephone systems – in other words - to a software-based communication solution like Microsoft Lync, for example. It offers many advantages

in comparison to the classic ISDN telephone system: The operating costs decrease due to a simplified infrastructure. What's more is thanks to outsourced server capacities, the system can be extended to any number of new employees. Integrating mobile terminals and instant messaging in the company's communication can also be carried out easily. On top of that, employees can conduct telephone and/or video conferences from any location. And, hosting online presentations via screen sharing is an additional and substantial feature.

All of these points play into the hands of companies that want to encourage working remotely. Furthermore, with software-based telephone systems it is comparatively easy to assign the same central number (e.g. +1 713 955 XXXX ext XX) to multiple employees of different locations, thereby, giving the impression that the company's employees all share the same office space.



Source: otolia.com - everythingpossible  
The budget alone should not be the determining factor when making technical decisions – but rather the relevance for one's own business situation

### Is it All About the Cloud?

However, one thing that, in times of the NSA exposure, should be well thought-out is the protection of your company's own data. From a technical point of view, an online backup in the Cloud is generally safer than the conventional data storage in one's own data center. That's because data centers in the Cloud resemble a maximum security unit: Lightning strikes, fires, power outages, theft and others can be practically ruled out. In addition, the Cloud can offer nearly unlimited storage capacities. Companies should, however, first evaluate the sensitivity of their information regarding data security before deciding for or against cloud computing. Generally speaking, mixed solutions are more often recommended here. With so-called hybrid scenarios particularly sensitive data, such as bank and customer information, are stored in an internal data center and the rest is located in virtual storage in the Cloud. Regardless for which solution a company with remote work decides, it is imperative that the employees follow exact guidelines and policies regarding the storage of data. This requires a uniform structure that allows for work to be done efficiently and without any further inquiries. This is particularly important for colleagues who are not working from the same location, as they cannot exchange themselves as quickly as in person.

### Human Resources is your Most Important Capital

For the remote working model, a few things must also be considered regarding the selection of personnel. New employees should have a certain level of technical know-how so they know how to handle small problems. When working from home,

employees normally receive their basic equipment before commencement of employment. Nowadays, this usually consists of a notebook, monitor, keyboard and mouse and possibly a mobile phone and tablet PC. Ideally, the equipment is provided with the basic software and respective tools for communication and security already installed, as well as, activated access to central systems like file-server. In order to be able to run everything, it is necessary for the employee to have a broadband connection in their house and the knowledge of how to connect their equipment.



Source: iStock - © AIMSTOCK  
You don't have to all be together at the same location to work efficiently as a team.

The company's tech support in particular must be carefully chosen, because different working conditions apply to remote teams. For this reason, higher organizational efforts are required due to the fact that virtual offices are not only located in various countries, but also in different time zones. Depending on and in accordance with the local public holidays, the IT department has to find a favorable time slot to update software and maintain the systems, which is not an easy feat when the colleagues are scattered across the globe. That means that the IT department in particular should have very good organizational and communication skills. These ensure dedicated planning and coordination with regard to technical maintenance procedures, and that daily business operations can run smoothly.

### Checklist

#### Preparation

- power supply/adaptor
- standards in telecommunications
- country-specific customs regulations regarding the import/export of technical equipment
- legal encryption guidelines
- laws regarding data storage

#### Personnel

- basic technical know-how & broadband connection at home
- key contact person for new colleagues
- employment law & residence permit for foreigners

#### Communication

- central communication platform
- linking all forms of communication (telephone, e-mail, chat, video)
- internal presence message (available or unavailable)

#### Knowledge Management

- central filing system
- possibility for jointly collaborating on documents
- authorization management

#### Time and Task Management

- team calendar – appointments visible to everyone
- clear task management
- conventional time-and-project management

#### Storage and Access

- data center, cloud or hybrid solution
- contents must be readable on all terminals; must be able to be edited on all terminals
- access privileges

#### Safety

- firewall system
- data safety – evaluation of the sensitivity of company data
- cloud computing