

## Mobile Working

The way that people organise their working lives has changed dramatically in the last two decades. The explosion of new technology means that working from home, on the move or at any location is now a viable option in almost any profession. So how has this complete change in the way we work come about?

The relentless march of the Internet

Ask a company 20 years ago about their online presence and in most cases you would have been met with a blank stare. Now, to do business, you have to be online, and in a big way. Instant messaging, WiFi and a plethora of technology now means that you can access the world wide web from anywhere, linking you to suppliers, competitors and your workforce at the touch of a button.

The revolution really started with the iconic 'brick' or first truly mobile phone. As the technology improved, mobile phones became smaller, more gadget-rich and affordable for everyone. With the latest generation of 'smart phones', the emphasis has been moved back from the mobile being a means of social interaction to its ability to be used as a tool for business. Now a mobile phone isn't just for making phone calls - you can check your emails, send messages, download pages from the Internet and even create spreadsheets on the go. Commuting time isn't just spent doing the crossword on the train now; it's become an intrinsic part of your working day.

The belief that a greater percentage of the UK's workforce would be working from home in the 21st Century has started to come true. Computers are now no longer cumbersome monoliths that take up an entire room. Lightweight laptops, Netbooks and PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) give you all the capabilities of a tower unit, but have the huge advantage of being mobile. All of your office documents can now fit into a flight bag and travel around the world with you, creating the ultimate in 'mobile offices'.

The power behind the technology

All of this modern hardware - your laptop, your smart phone and your Bluetooth headset - is nothing without the infrastructure to link them. And it is this infrastructure that is the real power behind mobile working. Internet connections are no longer dependant on a phone line and an external modem. The advent of digital networking means that, as long as you have the access code, you can plug into the Internet at any location that has a WiFi network. A large number of mobile devices are WiFi-compatible. Unlike Bluetooth, though, its use isn't confined to connecting up largely consumer items such as simple mobile phones. It can be used to network up whole offices and provide Internet access (often referred to as 'hotspots') almost anywhere - even outside. WiFi can transfer data at up to 54Mbps, which exceeds the speed of many cabled networks in offices.

At home, you have a couple of additional options that can work as a 'virtual office' network system. An extranet is a way of giving people access to business information using an Internet browser. It acts as a private network enabling you to share specified areas of information or operations with people like clients, customers, suppliers or staff, regardless of your location.

The alternative is a virtual private network (VPN), which is a secure way to give remote access to your network to other offices or individuals. Unlike systems of linking offices through phone lines, a VPN uses the Internet and encryption technology. This means it is extremely secure, widely accessible and comparatively cheap.

As international borders become meaningless in a technological age, the Internet has created a completely new way of doing business - through mobile working. This technological revolution will continue through the next 50 years, creating a very different business landscape to ones gone before, and as technology advances, new and more efficient ways of changing the way people work are bound to change that landscape even further.

## About the Author

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Alison Brundle

Design Co-Ordinator

[alison.brundle@scc.com](mailto:alison.brundle@scc.com)

