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# Understanding...

How to use your network to unlock  
the potential of flexible working



## Flexible working, but not as you know it...

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### It's time to take a fresh look at flexible working

Far from simply being a way to cut down on business travel or allow employees to log on to the business network from home, the possibilities offered by flexible working have expanded dramatically in recent years.

Today, flexible working technologies can transform productivity at all levels of the business. They allow your people to stay responsive, to collaborate, and to be effective, no matter where they are, what device they're using, or what information they need to access.

Yet research has found that 41 per cent of firms suffer business disruptions because of ineffective support for mobile technology<sup>1</sup>. So the challenge is how to get the most from flexible working without being tripped up by the technology demands that come with it.

This short guide has been written to help businesses address this issue.

**In the following pages we'll not only explain how the right IT and communications network lies at the heart of meeting this challenge, we'll also provide some tips and advice on how to move towards one that's right for your business.**

<sup>1</sup> Study released by the Business Performance Management Forum and Avaya, December 2006

## What do I stand to gain from the right network?

The right network can allow your staff to work in a truly flexible way. It can help your workforce to become more collaborative, more productive, and more motivated than ever before.

Below we outline some typical business scenarios and show how an IP network, and the features that come with them, can lead to these benefits.

### FLEXIBLE WORKING: COLLABORATION

#### Scenario:

You have been given just one day to put together a tender document for an exciting new piece of business. The three people needed to contribute to the document are in different locations – one is in the office, one is at home, and the other is travelling.

- **Video-conferencing.** You begin the day with a three-way video-conference, using the cameras attached to each person's PC or laptop.
- **Instant messaging.** Throughout the day, team members are in touch using instant messaging. Quicker and less formal than email, it is ideal for bouncing ideas around. The team can use this whether they are using their laptops, PCs or smart-phones.
- **Shared access to documents.** With the deadline fast-approaching, the team jump back on to a web conference call to check through the tender. Thanks to the virtual filing cabinet they use – an online tool for storing all the documents needed by any given project team – and web conferencing it's possible to view and edit it collaboratively. With minutes to spare, the document is ready.

### FLEXIBLE WORKING: PRODUCTIVITY

#### Scenario:

You need to get in touch with dozens of people each day. Updates need to be provided, decisions need to be made, and time is always against you. Yet many workers often say they don't get through to their co-workers on the first try. Over the course of a day, this can add up to serious amounts of wasted time.

- **Presence.** With the right network in place, a technology known as 'presence' can put an end to wasted minutes, especially for flexible workers who aren't based in the office. It allows users to see the status of their contacts – whether unavailable, free to talk, only contactable by email – before you try to get hold of them. This means you can choose the most appropriate form of contact.
- **Multiple voicemails.** If time is short and you need to send a message to more than one person, IP phones can allow you to simply click on the names of the people you want to get in touch with and then record a voicemail that goes instantly to each of them.

## FLEXIBLE WORKING: LOCATION INDEPENDENCE

### Scenario:

Many of your staff need to spend time away from the office. But they also need access to the same information as office-based workers, no matter where they are or what device they happen to be using.

- **A virtual private network.** Allows employees working away from the office to log on via the internet and access their company's system remotely. By allowing them to access office resources, like shared files or customer information, no matter where they are, virtual private networks help to give flexible workers a competitive edge.
- **IP telephony.** Where the phone system is integrated with the data network – it can allow employees to be as effective when away from the office as they are in the office. For example, a call centre agent working from home can provide the same level of service as his colleague in the office. The convergence of voice and data means that as soon as a call is received from a customer, the network can automatically match the incoming number to the appropriate set of customer records and then have them pop up on the customer service person's screen.
- **Softphones.** A softphone is a piece of software that allows a user to make and receive calls from their computer, over the IT network, without needing to use a traditional handset. For mobile workers this means the flexibility to chat while at the same time accessing documents and information on their laptop.

### Don't ignore training

In a study entitled 'IT Skills for Flexible Working' (carried out in early 2008 by The Centre for Future Studies):

- **62%** of people were found to lack the IT skills and training to properly exploit their existing technology,
- **88%** of SMEs do not provide specific IT training for remote workers,
- And **88%** of managers have not received any training on managing remote workers and are not familiar with the IT requirements.

**Providing workers with the right technology infrastructure is only one part of the flexible working equation. Training is just as important. Employees won't be able to take full advantage of 21st century flexible working if they don't know what it is capable of.**



## The right network for true flexible working

True flexible working, where users benefit from the advanced features described in the previous pages, is enabled by IP networks. These networks – where voice, data and video traffic travel along the same type of cabling – are transforming the way that people work.

Below we outline some of the considerations that need to be addressed by organisations wanting to enable effective flexible working.

### ↳ Make the network match your business

On an IP network, video, voice and data travel along the same cables. Different ‘priority’ levels need to be assigned to each. This means that a telephone call won’t be affected by data peaks, or a time-critical computer application isn’t slowed by a large e-mail.

Of course, what and how you prioritise may come down to the type of business you are, the type of industry you are in, and what type of flexible working you need to enable.

### ↳ Every business is different

Moving to a network that enables truly effective flexible working doesn’t have to be done in one ‘big bang’. For example, a feature like IP telephony can be added at a later date. And remember that every business is different. Your network and the flexible working requirements you have will be unique. Work with your technology provider to understand both the up-front capital investment required (financing can allow you to spread the cost of your investment), the ongoing operational costs involved and, crucially the potential cost savings of an IP network and of flexible working.

### ↳ Management

Does it make more sense for your in-house IT team to manage an IP network? Or does it make more sense for them to focus on more strategic issues so that a specialist provider can take care of the network, ensuring that flexible working technologies are delivered in just the way that the business needs?

### Keeping the best people

A growing number of research reports are finding a fascinating trend in the working population. Where status and salary used to be the most important factors to professionals, today work-life balance is increasingly coming to the fore.

Findings from a survey by The Work Foundation showed that **16%** would actually leave a new job within six months if their boss was not open to flexible working.

At BT, where flexible working is a cornerstone of working life, **99%** of new Mums return to the company after their maternity leave is over. This is more than twice the national average of 47%.

**Offering the best kind of flexible working technologies can help you to retain the best people.**

## Choosing the right supplier

The choice of technology partner to help you get the most out of flexible working is a crucial one. Get key network decisions wrong and the knock-on effects could be significant.

### ↳ Size and reach

As your business evolves and expands, so your network needs to grow with it. Make sure that your network provider can partner you all around the UK, and all around the world, if needed.

### ↳ Experience

Flexible working technologies are coming to play an ever more central role in modern business. Look for a provider that has experience in IP networks, as well as in flexible working practices and technologies. And because every business is different, make sure you select a supplier who can offer you a bespoke solution.

### ↳ Management

An emerging trend in 21st century business is for organisations to re-focus on their core areas of expertise, outsourcing areas that are important but non-core – such as the management of IT and communications networks – to specialist partners. Look for a provider that can not only provide the right kind of network for your flexible working needs, but also offers the skills to manage it.

### ↳ Partners

Look for a provider that has close partnerships with the best software and hardware makers. You should also consider working with a provider that is able to offer the simplicity of one contract, and one bill, backed by strict service guarantees will save you time and money.

## Flexible working – where will your journey take you?

At BT we believe flexible working technologies can be a tool to transform the productivity of your workforce.

The secret to succeeding is having the right network in place.

Flexible working technologies can offer you a competitive edge, giving your people access to the right information and resources, no matter where they are or what device they are using.

If you'd like to know more about how BT can help you take advantage of these opportunities, call **0800 032 7977** or visit [www.bt.com/IPconverge](http://www.bt.com/IPconverge).



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