

Technology Guide

It is important to choose the technology that will best suit performance, budget and security requirements, and enhance the communication channels between the office and the e-worker

One of the comforts of working within an office-based structure is the easy access to 'problem solvers' when technology is an issue. This may be internal or external IT support, helpdesks, or perhaps simply a technically minded colleague.

While it is important for the e-worker to also maintain access to such facilities, a competent level of self-reliance will be required if the e-worker is to maintain efficiency in a technology and communications driven environment. It is essential that the e-worker, their manager and their IT specialists look carefully at the requirements and specifications before the e-working begins.

It is important to assess the type of e-working to be undertaken. Perhaps the e-worker will need access to e-mail and some other business critical applications on the company network every day. Perhaps they need direct voice access to the office to make and receive calls using the company voice services. Or they need internet access, wherever their location. All of the above scenarios are easily supportable today.

A wide range of technology solutions now exist that allows secure access to corporate LANs (Local Area Networks) from any remote location. PCs or laptops with a modem allow the user to communicate in a speedy and effective manner. Laptop computers, PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), high speed DSL (Digital Subscriber Lines), and mobile data services are just some of the technology options that allow us to work whenever and where ever we want. However with such a wide variety of options available it is important to choose the technology that will best suit the performance, security and budgetary requirements.

Running costs are an important criteria. Dial options are 'pay as you use'; permanent connection options have a fixed cost.

Telephones

It is essential for the e-worker to maintain voice contact with the outside world. Many telephone technology options will tie in voice and data requirements; ISDN and DSL lines allow simultaneous voice and data access on the same line. Installing or activating a separate telephone line to distinguish between business and personal use is practical for monitoring costs.



Telephones can be enhanced using call management services such as call answering, call transfer, and call waiting. These facilities are available on a normal touch-tone phone and do not require the installation of expensive equipment.

Personal computers

The e-worker should be equipped with a suitable standard of hardware, and complete suite of software, to carry out all their PC activity to the same standards of efficiency as their office-based co-workers. Monitor size, data storage, virus screening and password protection are amongst the many considerations.

Technology for teamworkers

E-workers need the facilities to collaborate with colleagues as part of a team. 'Groupware' is a mix of business applications and communications software that gives remote workers a central location for shared documents, and a means of collaborating together at a distance.

Technology back at the office

A computer dedicated to meeting the needs of e-workers bridges the technology systems used in supply and receipt of traffic between the remote sites and the office LAN. It may include software to authenticate that users who dial in are who they say they are, and offer dial back security.

E-workers who connect to the office across the internet should also require firewall software to keep out unauthorised individuals and unknown software. The use of a PIN-code as authorisation is one option. With Calling Line Identification (CLI) the central computer recognises the e-worker and opens the connection.

In order to facilitate smooth e-working, there should be a contingency plan for everything from specifying the fundamental system to fixing a paper jam!

For further information go to www.familyfriendly.ie/ease-to-eworking

