Connect With My Team
IN REAL TIME
Know How Guide to Building and Managing a Virtual Team
CONNECT WITH MY TEAM IN REAL TIME

Know How Guide to Building and Managing a Virtual Team ............................................................ 01
Understanding the Implications of a Virtual Office: Benefits and Drawbacks ................................. 02
Using Technology to Build an Effective Virtual Office ......................................................................... 03
  Connectivity is key: choosing the right internet solution ................................................................. 03
  New phone systems for modern businesses ......................................................................................... 04
  Securing your business data ............................................................................................................... 05
Managing Your Virtual Team ................................................................................................................... 06
  Set objectives and meet often ........................................................................................................... 06
  Set regular work hours and try to stick to them ............................................................................... 07
  Make friends and build a team ......................................................................................................... 07
Putting It All Together ........................................................................................................................... 08
About Rogers ........................................................................................................................................ 08

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KNOW HOW GUIDE TO BUILDING AND MANAGING A VIRTUAL TEAM

The concept of telecommuting began in the 80s with the widespread adoption of the personal computer. The advent of the internet, however, changed the way businesses operate, making it possible for people to be more productive working from home than in a traditional office setting. Today, the idea of a completely virtual team has really started to take hold. But, as with any growing trend, there are some growing pains business owners need to consider before taking the plunge.

Whether you’re considering a completely virtual office, or just want to manage some of your team virtually, this Rogers Know How Guide will help you better understand the challenges and benefits of creating a virtual office. It also provides useful information about how technology can help you overcome most of the obstacles associated with running this type of organization. Finally, we’ve included our top advice for adopting productivity tools and provided tips for better managing your virtual team, once you’ve decided if it’s right for your business.
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF A VIRTUAL OFFICE: BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS

Over the years, many businesses have begun to operate entirely from a virtual office, meaning that there is no static headquarters or main office location. Some benefits of managing a virtual office are:

- Save rent.
- Reduce other overhead costs, like utilities and administrative support.
- It’s better for the environment.
- Businesses can hire from different geographic regions.
- Improved productivity, since employees can work more hours but commute less.
- A happier team that gets more flexible work hours.
- And last, but certainly not least, going to work in your PJs.

On the other hand, business owners may also face some real challenges during start-up, such as:

- Clients may take you and your business less seriously.
- You will have less face time with your team.
- Teams have less time together, which can hinder team building.
- Difficulty collaborating effectively.

While these challenges are very real, many of them can be alleviated with good planning and by adopting the right tools.
USING TECHNOLOGY TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE VIRTUAL OFFICE

Once you've overcome a few obstacles, it's clear that the benefits of a virtual office far out weigh the challenges. Addressing the drawbacks can also be easy with the right tools.

CONNECTIVITY IS KEY: CHOOSING THE RIGHT INTERNET SOLUTION

At the end of the day, choosing the right tools might be the most important decision you will make when setting up a virtual office. When you're not in a traditional office, your internet connection is your lifeline to staying connected. Your team needs reliable, fast connectivity, wherever they are. Consider getting a business-grade wired internet service that offers faster bandwidth and security options.

If there are members of your team who are highly mobile, like sales teams, field teams or frequent business traveller, you might also want to consider a mobile internet solution for ultimate portability and productivity. A USB internet stick or mobile hotspot can provide high speed connectivity in airports, hotels, clients' offices or even at the cottage, without the need to search for Wi-Fi hotspots.

If you're considering mobile internet, remember to ask for wireless internet plans that provide generous amounts of data, flexible rates that adjust along with your usage, or ones that let you share the internet plan between your mobile internet device and your smartphone to avoid wasting data each month.

Roaming and travel solutions are also important, since they help ensure that your team has the tools it needs to stay connected and be productive from anywhere business travel takes them. Choosing the right roaming option, like Roaming Data Passes or Travel Packs is essential for casual or frequent travellers because they provide the affordability and cost assurance to seamlessly work from the road.

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NEW PHONE SYSTEMS FOR MODERN BUSINESSES

Just because you work from a home office doesn’t mean your customers have to know. Picking the right voice connectivity is very important when setting up a virtual office. Not only is it an invaluable tool to keep your team connected, it can also help create the illusion that your office is bigger than it is – which can be important to some customers. Getting the right communications platform can ensure that your customers always enjoy a professional experience, regardless of where your team is.

When choosing a phone system, consider a cloud-based business phone platform that delivers all the features of a traditional phone - minus a costly set-up and bulky hardware. A hosted IP voice system can work with existing phones and mobile devices, so you can work from your office or wherever business takes you. Look for services that allow you to set answering rules or re-route calls to ensure your customers never get a busy signal. A good system should also allow you to access online administration portals and manage calling features using your computer, tablet or smartphone.

You might also want to consider a web-based solution, like Rogers One Number™ for business, that lets you take calls on your mobile device, compatible tablet or computer, and seamlessly transfer calls between devices without ever missing a word. Rogers One Number™ plan lets you talk, text, send picture messages and even video chat with or other Rogers One Number™ users. Web solutions can allow you to easily create rules to reroute certain calls and better manage wireless minutes, provide the freedom to move around while on a call, and also help ensure that no calls go unanswered.

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SECURING YOUR BUSINESS DATA

Most businesses understand the importance of connecting to their team and business data, but they forget the importance of securing it. You wouldn’t drive a car or buy a house without purchasing insurance to safeguard against accidents or disasters, so why wouldn’t you do the same with your sacred business information?

There are great tools available to help you secure your business against a disaster or cybercrime. Look for providers that offer secure data back-up solutions for your business, to ensure your data is automatically backed-up and stored off-site. Also consider enforcing password and encryption rules, in case a team member’s device goes missing. Consider implementing a business-grade security solution for virus and spyware protection, content filtering, fraud protection and Wi-Fi security for you and your entire team.
MANAGING YOUR VIRTUAL TEAM

Now that you have the tools and know how to set-up your virtual office, here are some tips to better manage your team and stay connected.

SET OBJECTIVES AND MEET OFTEN.

When teams are physically removed from each other, it can be easy to give too much independence. Setting objectives and meeting regularly will help ensure that everybody is focused on common goals. They also help ensure that your team is staying challenged.

While email is a great way to communicate, weekly team meetings are most effective when they’re live. Not only will they be faster and more efficient, they’ll also help you get a better sense of whether your team is staying motivated and on task.

Audio and web conferencing services are a great solution for these types of meetings. They help you collaborate with your team by letting you chat, annotate documents and share applications, all in real-time. All you need is internet access and a basic telephone line to conduct collaborative electronic meetings. And, if you have a webcam, video conferencing allows you to meet face-to-face, no matter how far away you are.
SET REGULAR WORK HOURS AND TRY TO STICK TO THEM.

One of the greatest benefits of a virtual office is that your employees have the freedom to work from anywhere. So give them the right tools to help ensure they can be their most productive. Tablets, smartphones and mobile internet products help ensure that you’re always connected and that your team stays happy and productive.

That being said, the downside of virtual offices is that packing it in at 5 o’clock can be a difficult proposition. Make sure you’re clear about expected output from your team and then try to be respectful of their non-work hours. Keep emails and phone calls to a minimum during off hours and you will be rewarded with more productivity during the hours they are delivering.

MAKE FRIENDS AND BUILD A TEAM.

One of the biggest problems with managing a virtual office and team is that there’s no proverbial water cooler. This can make it difficult for teams to bond and develop the type of camaraderie that people have in a physical office.

Make an effort to get to know your team personally and encourage them to do the same. Start web conferences off by asking about kids or by celebrating a birthday together. Sometimes, the little things can go a long way. Maybe consider sending cupcakes to your team to celebrate an anniversary or milestone, and be sure to share company success regularly. This will help foster a sense of team and improve teamwork.

You might also want to consider using an instant messaging application that allows you to save, bookmark and search previous conversations for later retrieval. Alternatively, team voice, internet and SMS plans for smartphones often provide unlimited communication between a group of devices, so your team can stay in touch and become friends.
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Building and managing a virtual office has its challenges, but Rogers has tools that can help. The right set-up is the key to ensuring that your team can thrive in a virtual structure- they just need the right connectivity. Our experts have the tools and know how to provide your business with customized advice for your unique needs.

• Looking for more advice for your business? Visit our Know How Centre.
• Learn more about Rogers Internet Plans, Rogers One Number for Business, Rogers Roaming Plans, SmartTeam™ Share Plans, and Rogers Mobile Internet to learn if they are right for your business.
• Talk to a Rogers Business consultant.

ABOUT ROGERS

Rogers Communications connects small businesses to customers, suppliers, partners and employees with fast and reliable wireless, telephone, internet and TV services. Over 1.5 million business customers rely on Rogers for proven tools and the know how to keep them connected. Our affordable services run on our proven networks, backed by 24/7 technical support.