



REMOTE WORKING AND YOUR BUSINESS:
The Tool You Need to Have



55 Main Street, Suite 315,
Newmarket, NH 03857
(888) 704-3183

www.amdcomm.com

Before January 2020, there were several good reasons to consider having a remote work program in place. Natural disasters of any scale and inclement weather certainly qualified, as did more localized calamities like fires or floods. There was even good reason with employee absenteeism. Employees with colds no longer needed to infect an office; just work from home until you felt better and then come back in.

With the arrival of February 2020 and the COVID-19 disease caused by the novel coronavirus, however, remote work capabilities went from “nice to have” to “absolutely necessary.” Under threat of infection, and in many cases by force of law, businesses were required to shut down unless remote work was an option. For businesses that didn’t have such an option, disaster struck: no work could be done at all. For those who did, some work could carry on. The legacy of COVID-19 will likely take years to fully work out, but it has made one thing perfectly clear: making provisions for remote work will ensure continuity of business – even in the worst times.

PREVENTING DISASTER WITH THE PROGRAM: REAP THE BENEFITS OF MAKING IT WORK

Remote work had been approached with some skepticism for years. People like former Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer were stridently against it. Mayer defended that stance until late 2015, when she expressed the hope to Business Insider that this wouldn’t ultimately be her legacy.

Ultimately, it was. The fact that Mayer herself worked from home following the birth of her first child certainly didn’t help matters.

While Mayer argued strenuously that in-person meetings improved the quality of both baseline business ideas and decision-making processes, she either ignored or overlooked the people in a business that simply make ideas and decisions actually happen. For these people who drive the operational side of business, working from home is a clear benefit. In fact, businesses experience a range of benefits by opening up to telecommuting:

Greater flexibility

The 9-5 workday was great in the 1980s when most clients were in the immediate area – or at least in the same country. Our modern work environment has us engaging with employees – and schedules – from all over the world. With remote work, keeping people working when that client half a world away wakes up becomes a simple matter.

Improved access to talent

Remote work allows businesses to hire from nearly anywhere with a functioning internet connection. There's no need to limit hiring to whomever is in the immediate area; the best candidates are your options, no matter where the business is physically located.

Improved employee morale

Ever consider all those “must-dos” of life that make it work? Mailing a bill, for example, or going to the bank all require an employee's presence, often during the same time period as a normal work day. How effectively can an employee write a report when they are in a panic over how to pick up their kid from daycare? Allowing remote work frees up employees to address those little points of life, putting less stress on an employee to accomplish tasks. That reduced stress will show through in quality of work and boost employee esteem and satisfaction.

Cost savings for all

A robust remote work program keeps cars off streets, and carbon footprints down – supporting the ongoing push to “go green” many businesses today are striving for. It also reduces the expenses employees incur from commuting, like gas and vehicle wear. Better yet, it reduces utility costs for businesses. Why pay to light a building for people to work inside it? Instead, let employees work from home and pay for their own lights. That applies to sewer, water, and heating costs as well.

BUILDING THE PROGRAM: WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO MAKE IT WORK

With the benefits of a remote work program now clear, the issue becomes how to set such a program up. For businesses who already have remote working options, just expanding them will likely work. For those who have never started before,

however, a wonderful new opportunity to build the best program from the ground up is at hand. Here's how to get started:

Networking is a must

Start with the basics of networking. Remote work cannot begin without the right connectivity tools, and your network may not be ready to absorb that kind of incoming traffic. Your network may be perfectly optimized to run within your building, but it may not be properly configured to allow outside traffic in. With that in mind, don't forget...

Beef up your security

It was one thing to secure a business that didn't have traffic coming in from outside; all you really needed to do was bulk up your perimeter defenses and try to keep out the hackers. With traffic now needing to come in, you'll not only need to be sure that your network can handle the flow, but that it can handle the flow safely. That incoming flow needs a safe entry point, and only proper network security will do. Consider tools like multi-factor authentication for network access, as well as strong passwords, or even biometric access if you can.

A way to work

Now that you have made remote work possible, you must provide the means to make it productive. A virtual desktop system can be one of the best ways to do that since it effectively allows a computer to share a desktop with another system. We all know that desktops are the best place to keep our files, right there out in the open where they can be seen and readily interacted with. A virtual desktop allows for that same level of interaction to exist remotely, meaning that any computer can effectively be your work computer.

The right tools

Consider a range of managed services as well. While a virtual desktop gives employees access to every tool they currently have on their in-office desktop, it's entirely possible that there are tools businesses have never even considered using. Managed services open up a whole new range of tools. Better

yet, they have absolute flexibility: these tools are useful for both remote and in-office workers .

Brace for disaster

Remote-working operations are tailor-made for disasters. Whether it's a fire in your office, a blizzard sweeping the area, or a pandemic sweeping the country, remote work keeps operations working as long there's a functioning area with power and communications around. So while you're planning for business continuity with remote working, consider also providing continuity with cloud-based disaster recovery systems. The same fire that guts your office and makes remote work an excellent idea will need ongoing data support, and keeping your data safe offsite is a good plan. Look for established systems that specialize in quick response to ensure that your data will not only be safe in its offsite storage, but also readily accessed by you and your employees in case of need.

RUNNING THE PROGRAM: HOW YOUR BUSINESS WILL NEED TO CHANGE TO MAKE IT WORK

There's one last change to consider before launching a remote-work program, and it's a fairly complex one. You won't need it to actually start a remote-working operation, but you'll need it if you hope to get anywhere with it – especially over the long-term. That change is a matter of corporate culture, and you'll find that several points of business operations need to change in order to make the most of this valuable tool:

Be clear

One of the biggest points that stopped a lot of companies from going remote is that the potential for slacking off is enormous. After all, when the cat's away, the mice do often play – and the cat never so much as crosses the threshold of a remote worker. So in order to protect against that, be very clear about goals. Avoid measuring goals in terms of hours, but rather in terms of deliverables as much as possible. That way, you have an easy way to make sure the mouse is still working – even when the cat isn't in the same building.

Trust, but verify

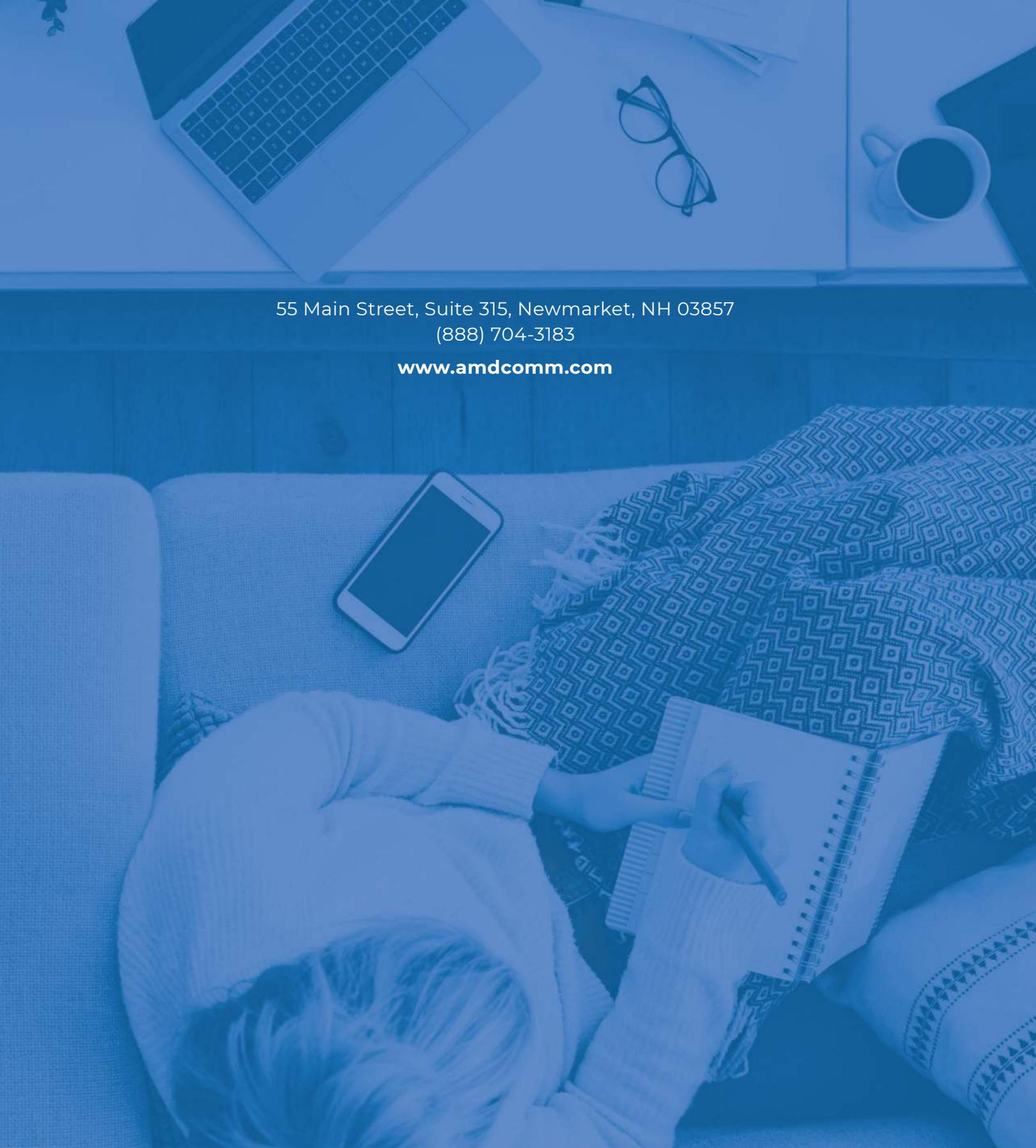
One of Ronald Reagan's great borrowed maxims in the 1980s was "trust, but verify." This applies wonderfully to remote workers as well. You hired this person to do work for you, so leave them to their work. Meanwhile, use the clarity described previously to measure how the employee is doing. When you demonstrate that you trust the employee to do the right thing regularly, it results in the right thing being done. If it doesn't, it might be time to find a different employee.

Don't be a jerk

Don't insist on preposterous check-in schedules. Don't require monitoring tools installed on their home PCs. Don't demand the employee stay on a video chat with the home office all day to ensure compliance. In fact, don't do anything that involves the word "compliance" unless it's required by law somewhere. It's understandable to be concerned; remote working is still fairly new and raises valid concerns. But being heavy-handed simply because you're in charge is going to turn off remote workers as much as it does in-office workers, and could cause you to lose some great employees.

Remote working is a powerful tool

With the outbreak of COVID-19, remote work has allowed some businesses to stay alive that would otherwise have been forced by law to shut down. It works well outside of pandemics, too; no more risking lives on icy roads, or running afoul of local governments who issue orders to keep people off roads. The benefits of remote work extend far beyond mere continuity of operations: it improves morale, allows for added flexibility, and has both economic and environmental value beyond what anyone might expect. It may not work for everyone, but the more we put remote working to work, the better off we all are.



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