

THE TOP 10 WORK-FROM-HOME TOOLS

Whether it's cold and flu season or a full-blown outbreak of the zombie apocalypse, sooner or later there will be a point where large amounts of your workforce must stay home, including you. You can't just lose all of that time, you need to facilitate productivity at home.

Here is what you'll need when going to the office just isn't an option.

1

MICROSOFT TEAMS

This one application is a powerhouse of collaboration! You can share documents, instant message, and hold video conferences all in one convenient location. No need to travel to the office when you can work with coworkers like they're sitting right next to you.

2

ONEDRIVE

Tired of copying files to a flash drive, or emailing documents back and forth? Not only is it cumbersome, but it's also easy to lose track of what version of the document you're working with or what changes you have made. Instead, keep everything on OneDrive and access the files from anywhere. With just a couple clicks you can even share with your coworkers, whether they're across the hall, across town or half-way across the world.

3

SHAREPOINT

OneDrive is ideal for your personal files, but what about documents that your entire team is working on? For that, you can use SharePoint. SharePoint gives your entire team a hub that facilitates collaboration in real-time, file sharing and version control.

4

MICROSOFT STREAM

No need to get everyone together in a classroom for training, Microsoft is a live and on-demand video platform that's perfect for continuing education. Host your training on Microsoft Stream and your team can access it from anywhere in the world.

5

OFFICE 365

You might have figured out by now that the top four tools are all part of Office 365, and if you don't already know that, this should blow your mind! The applications we've already discussed, along with Office standards like Word, Excel and PowerPoint, all come with a single monthly subscription! But it's more than just affordable and convenient, Office 365 is incredibly robust and mobile. All the applications store their data in the cloud and are accessible on any device, including Windows, Macintosh, smartphones, tablets and even web browsers. That's right, even if all you have at home is a web browser you can still edit Word documents from OneDrive, collaborate on your PowerPoint presentation in Microsoft Teams or share those Excel numbers on SharePoint. It's all connected, accessible anywhere and familiar.

Once you have your basic collaboration and telecommuting needs met with Office 365, it's time to address the more complex challenges.

6

ZOOM

You'll feel like you're in the same room as your coworkers and clients, even if you're on different continents with this proven telecommuting application. You can make video or voice calls and even share your screen and collaborate on documents.

7

VOICE OVER IP PHONE SYSTEMS

A Voice Over IP phone system allows you to access your office phone and voicemail from anywhere. That means, as calls come in, you can answer them on your home phone, mobile phone or even dedicated handset you can take with you on the road. And when you make a call, it looks like it's coming from your office, even if you're sitting at home.

8

LAPTOPS AND MOBILE DEVICES

Most of us have our home PCs but they might not be up to replacing our office computers. Fortunately, as we discussed earlier, Office 365 can be accessed with just a web browser, but if you're doing more than using Word, Excel and PowerPoint, you will need a computer that can perform. Better to think about that now than when you're stuck at home, cursing how slow your computer is or fighting with your kids because you're eating into their Fortnite time.

9

VPN

A VPN is a Virtual Private Network and it's been a key piece of work-from-home technology for a long time. When setup properly, it allows you to access your office network from home. The problem is, VPNs are complex to setup and difficult to maintain. Given the incredible cloud-based tools available today, through Office 365, you rarely need a VPN. But there are still times a VPN is the only way to work from home, like when you have an on-premise database or application server.

10

VIRTUAL COMPUTERS

If you really need the power of your office PC along with access to the data on your office network, there are a lot of on-premise virtual machine options available. You can create an entire virtual computer to access from home or an application server that can make your most demanding tools available outside of the office. Taking the virtual computer a step further, you can create a computer that lives in the cloud and use it all the time, whether you're in the office or stuck at home with the flu. A cloud-based virtual computer is a full-blown computer that's easy to access anywhere and is exactly the same no matter where you access it.

CYBERSECURITY

Technically, cybersecurity isn't a tool, so it's not in the list, but a discussion about work-from-home tools can't go by without addressing cybersecurity. Remember how we talked about flash drives being cumbersome? Well, it's much worse than that. If that flash drive has client data and gets lost or stolen, it's a real problem! If your laptop isn't encrypted and gets stolen, all that data's vulnerable. What about your home network, are your neighbors accessing your Wi-Fi? Is it secure from hackers? Are you taking that laptop to a cafe and using the public Wi-Fi?

Whether you're strictly working from home or just developing a mobile workforce, you need a cybersecurity expert to help you keep your data safe.

Cybersecurity is just one of many things you need to consider when you're developing your work-from-home plans. Office 365 has three versions with different abilities and add-ons based on the plan you choose. Which one is right for you? If you already have Office 365, are you using it to your greatest advantage? What about the complex work of setting up a phone system, VPN or vir-

tual computer? What laptop will have enough power for you?

Your work-from-home contingency plan is not a go-it-alone, DIY type project.

You need a trusted IT consultant to help you develop your plan, and you need to get started now while there's still time!

Advantage Technology has the IT consultants you need. They have been in business for 20 years, have over 80 trained technicians and serve over 800 businesses and organizations in West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia and Pennsylvania. They specialize in emerging areas of information technology and have dedicated resources to specific disciplines, rather than merely being computer generalists. Their focus on innovation enables them to expand into cutting-edge areas of technology and solve any IT challenge.



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