SUPPORTING TELEWORK: A CHANNEL CHALLENGE

By Ellis Booker

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ABOUT
THE AUTHOR

ELLIS BOOKER is a familiar name in the computer trade press, where he held senior editorial posts at a number of A-list IT publications, including CMP's [now UBM's] InternetWeek, Mecklermedia's Web Week and IDG's Computerworld. At Computerworld, he led the paper's internet and electronic commerce coverage in the early days of the web and was responsible for creating its weekly Internet Page. Most recently, Booker was editor-in-chief of Crain Communication Inc.'s BtoB, the only magazine devoted to covering the intersection of business strategy and business marketing. He ran BtoB, as well as its sister title Media Business, for a decade.

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SUPPORTING TELEWORK: A CHANNEL CHALLENGE

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HALF OF THE U.S. WORKFORCE HOLDS JOBS THAT ARE COMPATIBLE WITH AT LEAST PARTIAL TELEWORK, AND APPROXIMATELY 20 TO 25 PERCENT of the workforce teleworks at some frequency, according to Global Workplace Analytics, which maintains a database of over 4,000 documents on telework/telecommuting, alternative workplace strategies, workplace flexibility and employee wellness/and well-being ROI. Other Global Workplace Analytics' research finds:

- Regular work-at-home, among the non-self-employed population, has grown by 103 percent since 2005.
- 3.7 million people — 2.8 percent of the workforce — now work from home at least half the time.
- 80 percent to 90 percent of the U.S. workforce would like to telework at least part time.

Meanwhile, as your customers evaluate formal telework policies, employees are already spending about half their time away from their desks, studies show. Thanks to laptops and, more recently, powerful smartphones connected to high-speed mobile networks — the U.S. is the world's largest 4G market — employees are increasingly mobile, conducting business outside traditional office settings.

As discussed its June State of the Internet Report, Akamai found that global average connection speeds rose 23 percent year-over-year, to 6.3 Mbps in Q1. Akamai's quarterly report also finds that 8.5 percent of users now have broadband speeds of at least 25.0 Mbps, the closest the figure has ever been to double digits.

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Productivity = Bandwidth

Keeping a customer's teleworkers productive means ensuring they can access the network as well as SaaS and collaboration applications without undue delay. Tips from Time Warner Cable Business Class include making sure customers have enough bandwidth into their sites, and offer the option to assess teleworkers' home setups. For example, you might run a test video conference for all teleworkers. This is a demanding application that will likely expose problems

That's not to say broadband is equally distributed, even in the United States. As recently as July, a group of 28 U.S. senators urged the Federal Communications Commission to update the Universal Service Fund's (USF) Mobility Fund, which is aimed at providing broadband service to rural and underserved areas. According to the FCC, 87 percent of rural Americans (52.2 million) lack access to mobile broadband with minimum advertised speeds of 10 Mbps/1 Mbps, compared with 45 percent of those living in urban areas.

And, there are notable disparities along socioeconomic lines. According to a report on broadband access published in late 2015 by researchers at the Brookings Institute, a D.C.-based think tank, while 75 percent of American households had a broadband internet subscription in 2014, that was true of only 46.8 percent of households with incomes under $20,000 and for 54.1 percent of individuals with less than a high school diploma.

Uneven distribution of high-speed internet means barriers to telework. Still, the trend lines seem clear: More and more employees are telecommuting, at least some of the time. A Gallup poll published in the summer of 2015 found 37 percent of U.S. workers say they have telecommuted, up slightly from 30 percent last decade but four times greater than the 9 percent found in 1995.

Nevertheless, Gallup noted that telecommuting remains "much more the exception than the rule," with U.S. workers telecommuting from home about two days per month, on average. There has been a significant shift in the time of day workers telecommute as well, Gallup found.

"In the past, more telecommuters said they most often telecommuted outside of working hours in addition to going into the office during the day. But now they are as likely to say they telecommute during the workday instead of going to the office. This represents a significant shift in the nature of telecommuting, from its use as a supplement to the normal workday to its use as a replacement for being in the office."

However, the Gallup poll concludes the average number of workdays that workers telecommute has not changed much since 2006. The reasons highlight opportunities for channel partners able to provision that critical broadband and layer on unified communications, security, cloud and other products and services.

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Make the Sale: Telework Program

From a partner perspective, selling a customer on setting up a telework program means sales in fiber connectivity, security, backups, UC and cloud as well as value-added advisory services like writing policies and running training sessions for employees on UC, security and other topics.

To make the case, sit down with customers and the Global Workplace Analytics' Workplace Savings Calculator. Employers can save an average of $11,000 per half-time teleworker per year, the result of less turnover and absenteeism and increased productivity. Real estate savings are iffier, but money saved may more than offset enabling technology and bandwidth investments

CONCERNS: EMPLOYEES, EMPLOYERS DIFFER

"From the employee perspective, most research says [telework] is a desirable benefit," said Tim Herbert, senior vice president of research and market intelligence at CompTIA.
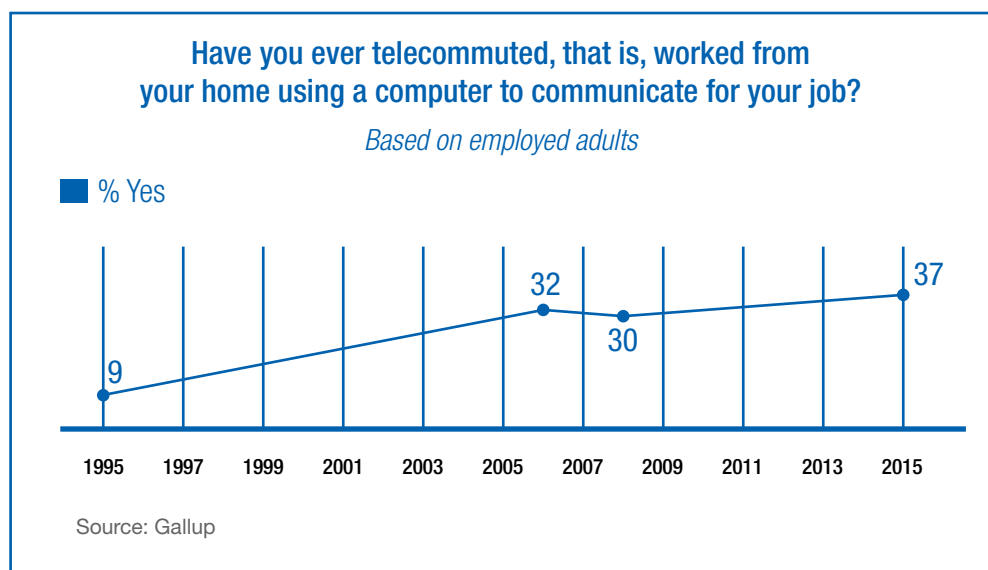
"I love working from home ... and I decline other opportunities because they mean going into the office again," says Therese Henderson, a customer service rep for Canadian telecommunications company Telus Corp. Avoiding a commute means less stress plus hard savings on clothes, gas and food, Henderson says, adding that Telus is very proud of its home-agent initiative, which it touts for reducing the company's carbon footprint while increasing morale and productivity.

Then again, some home environments aren't suitable for telework — think screaming infants, barking dogs and spotty Wi-Fi connections. Or, employees may simply crave the social interaction and camaraderie of an office environment. (Technology is starting to fill these gaps, as we'll see in the "Enabling Technologies" section.)

Finally, there's a lingering worry among employees that too much time away from the office can negatively affect their career advancement. Whatever the reason, CompTIA's Herbert said his association's research, along with other studies, indicate people don't want to telework "too frequently."

One answer: robust conferencing and collaboration software.

From the point of view of employers, perhaps the top concern about telework is that remote workers won't be as productive as their office-bound counterparts. Yet Gallup's most recent polling data finds that most Americans, including both those employed and not employed, believe people who work remotely are just as productive as those who work in an office. The 58 percent holding this view is up from 47 percent the first time Gallup asked the question in 1995.

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Have you ever telecommuted, that is, worked from your home using a computer to communicate for your job?

Based on employed adults

■ % Yes

```
                                          32              37
                                                   30
        9
     1995  1997  1999  2001  2003  2005  2007  2009  2011  2013  2015
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Source: Gallup

About 20 percent of Gallup's poll say telecommuters are less productive — a result that is essentially unchanged since 1995.

Despite concerns, CompTIA's Herbert says the vast majority of companies are offering some kind of telework, often on a continuum from informal acceptance of the practice to a formal program. It's on the ad-hoc end of the spectrum that solutions providers can jump in.

Not surprisingly, heavily regulated industries or those with heightened security profiles (finance, legal, health care), may view telework as an unwarranted risk. Yet Herbert notes that the federal government — a traditionally risk-adverse entity — is expanding its telecommuting support. He speculates this could be to satisfy budgetary mandates.

"Telework is considered a perk," Herbert says, and thus can be a way to incentivize workers in organizations that aren't able to give competitive salaries or raises. Anyone who's commuted on the D.C. area's congested roadways knows the value of a flexible work environment.

"Absolutely, companies are creating formal telework policies as a recruiting tool," says Matthew Green, an HR executive who recently retired after a long career with multinational power management company Eaton Corp.

Even traditionally conservative manufacturing companies like Eaton, Green said, know that recruiting millennial workers isn't simply a matter of salary and bonus. "Companies need every advantage they can find to successfully recruit top talent," Green says. "Flexible benefits and perks like telecommuting can be the difference-maker for candidates, particularly millennials."

This opinion maps to CompTIA's report, "Managing the Multigenerational Workforce," which puts it this way: "Younger workers have grown up in an era where flexibility is the norm, and this is reflected in their view that companies that do not offer a telecommuting option are old-fashioned."

Hardly the image most customers want to project.

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Pereceptions of Telecommuting

NET percentage that agrees with...	Total	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Companies that do not offer the option to telecommute are old-fashioned	44%	53%	47%	33%
I am more likely to join a company that offers the option to telecommute	53%	63%	57%	41%
I'd accept a position with a slightly lower salary with the option to telecommute	38%	42%	44%	28%
Telecommuting allows me to get more work done as I don't face office distractions	56%	63%	61%	47%
Many managers hold the belief that telecommuters don't work as hard	58%	61%	57%	56%
I like to be physically present in the office	57%	57%	57%	58%

Source: CompTIA, Managing the Multigenerational Workforce

One savings that can be elusive is real estate. CompTIA's research finds millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers are in lockstep about wanting some time physically in the office. Employees of all age groups in CompTIA's research value the connection and creativity of face-to-face interactions. Only 10 percent of respondents want a situation where they don't come into the office at all. The ideal mix? Forty-four percent of respondents want to work in the office three or four days a week. And, CompTIA data shows telecommuting preferences are nearly identical between men and women.

Where do teleworkers and the organizations they work for run into trouble?

According to CompTIA's Herbert, excluding problems with the enabling technologies, problems arise when there are inadequate policies and expectations.

"For example, if there aren't firm guidelines on the use of work technology for personal uses, employees might be too casual with their business-owned devices," he said. This might include inappropriate downloads or letting children use a work laptop. At the same time, Herbert notes, your customers are well aware that their employees are merging work and personal lives. Thus, policies, guidelines and technology have to be flexible.

"Employers recognize this is in their best interest," he says.

As for the enabling technology for telework — from fast and secure networks to collaboration suites — Herbert says we have all of the pieces, and companies are almost to the point where tech is working as it's supposed to. A partner well-versed in managed service options can pull the tech pieces together.

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He adds that customers that struggle with the telework may have broader issues to confront, such as poor contingency planning, a lack of remote administration tools or insufficient support procedures for satellite workers. Partners can help there with policies, perhaps even setting up a lunch and learn session between customers with mature telework programs and those interested in formalizing arrangements.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

We see three important enabling technology categories for telework: cloud, collaboration and security. Let's look at each in turn.

Cloud

Unquestionably, cloud services are hot right now. The cloud software market reached $48.8 billion in revenue in 2014, representing a 24.4 percent year-over-year growth rate, according to market research firm IDC, which expects cloud software will grow to surpass $112.8 billion by 2019 at a compound annual growth rate of 18.3 percent.

IDC also forecasts that sales of SaaS will significantly outpace packaged software product delivery, growing nearly five times faster than the traditional software market and becoming a significant growth driver for the channel. By 2019, IDC says, the cloud software model will account for $1 of every $4.59 spent on software.

Significantly, adoption of online suites has jumped since 2013, when only 25 percent were using them. Many observers say that, as offerings such as Microsoft Office 365 and Google Drive add capabilities, users will continue to turn away from locally installed software.

Case Study: Motorola's Telework

"About 10 years ago, during a period of explosive growth, Motorola encouraged employees to telecommute as an alternative/offset to building out more office space," says Matt Greenberger, a consumer experience champion at Motorola, where he leads the company's Global Social Media program for Customer Care. "At the time, they offered a financial incentive to those who would commit to a certain number of days in the week out of the office. You could receive several hundred dollars credit or reimbursement to offset the costs of setting up a home office."

Greenberger already worked away from the office one or two days per week, so he signed up, using the stipend to purchase an ergonomic desk chair and a wireless router.

Although the incentive has since been discontinued, working from home has become a standard practice at Motorola. These days, Greenberger goes into the office one or two days per week, mainly to attend a few in-person meetings.

"With a global team, most interactions are via video conference, and you can be equally effective from anywhere," Greenberger says. "But I do feel that some physical presence is important [because] it helps promote closer relationships with peers." He also cites "chance" encounters and conversations that can result in important shared information and insight into new projects.

Motorola handles security for workers like Greenberger with a VPN and RSA's SecurID, a two-factor authentication product that consists of a token, either hardware- or software-based, which is assigned to a computer user and generates an authentication code at fixed intervals (usually 60 seconds). In addition, Motorola uses Gmail with validation for additional security.

Greenberger is a fan of telework, but cautions that it can stretch the workday and take over the home-based employee's life.

"If you are in a position to have boundaries for work hours, by all means do so," he said. "If you find that your work-from-home time consistently stretches to consume your personal time, try to take some comp time or otherwise reassess your approach."

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Cloud apps have another advantage for the often-mobile teleworker: They span devices, increasingly obviating the need to "take a copy" on a USB drive from a desktop computer for use on a laptop in a coffee shop at lunchtime.

Collaboration

One oft-heard complaint about telework is that it fails to match the casual, face-to-face interactions of an office setting. This has negative ramifications for creativity and collaboration, say critics.

Enter not only Microsoft and Google, which are adding social components to their software suites, but a wide variety of UC&C providers. The end goal is clear: Integrate instant messaging, video conferencing and social commenting/voting/sharing systems into office productivity platforms.

The expectations of millennial workers are pushing software giants to integrate these and other "informal communications" apps into office systems, as younger workers are much more likely to use apps like text, Skype and instant messaging than their 50-plus colleagues.

Consider Skype, the VoIP conferencing company Microsoft bought in 2011 for $8.5 billion, which today claims more than 300 million active users per month. In the last few years, Skype has added better smartphone support (iOS and Android), and even an official Linux desktop client. And just this month, Microsoft announced that it's transitioning Skype from a peer-to-peer architecture to a cloud-based one, a change that will support a host of new features, including mobile group video calling; near-real-time translations of conversations; and bots for automated, artificial-intelligence-powered services.

Getting teleworkers to use video conferencing is another matter. The technology pieces are there, but the sociology lags. Still, plenty of observers are looking ahead, imagining, for instance, an "always on" video feed between the remote worker and the home office, perhaps rendered as an augmented reality overlay.

Other collaboration tools include Slack, a cloud-based team tool that claims more than 3 million daily active users; Microsoft's Yammer; and Facebook's Facebook at Work.

IDC predicts the global enterprise social network market, which includes collaboration and messaging tools, will hit $3.5 billion by 2019, or roughly 19 percent growth per year. That said, analysts say enterprise collaboration tools still have a way to go in connecting employees to actionable business process. Again, this is an area where partners can help.

Security

Network and application security is a central concern for every customer, and remote offices or teleworker arrangements magnify the worry. After all, remote access makes every device a logical extension of the network. Unless a teleworker's PC is properly secured, it poses additional risk — not only to the information being accessed, but the customer's networks and on-premises systems. Concern over online data backups are real as well.

Related Reports

Mobile Security: 9 Discussion Points to Make the Sale
Yes, it can be a struggle to mitigate the very real risks of an on-the-go workforce without negating the productivity benefits. But the worst thing a customer can do is ignore mobile security. In this Report, we give you some talking points to start the discussion.

DOCSIS 3.1: Enter the Gigasphere
There's never been a networking need that couldn't be satisfied with more bandwidth, and the cable industry is ready to oblige with gigabit fiber networks via a significant technology upgrade. This Report examines why DOCSIS 3.1 is the answer for truly widespread gigabit service.

Video Conferencing Demands Smart Network Design
The use of video conferencing is on the rise. That's good for collaboration, but more video between more endpoints presents significant challenges. This Report looks at methods for estimating bandwidth requirements and how to make all the various elements involved work together to deliver QoS.

When helping customers develop a policy for securing telework devices, a good starting place is the National Institute of Standards and Technology, which in March released two new draft publications that revised its 2009 guides. Both the Guide to Enterprise Telework, Remote Access, and Bring Your Own Device Security and the User's Guide to Telework and Bring Your Own Device Security are free. There's no need to start from scratch writing policies.

Among the recommendations for securing a PC in use by remote or traveling employees:

- A combination of security software, such as antivirus software, personal firewalls, spam and web content filtering and popup blocking, will stop most attacks, particularly malware.
- Restrict who can use the PC by having a separate standard user account for each employee. And, don't give users admin access.
- Ensure that patches and updates are regularly applied to the operating system and primary applications, such as web browsers, email clients, instant messaging clients and security software.
- Disable unneeded networking features on the PC and configure wireless networking securely.
- Configure primary applications to filter content and stop other activity that is likely to be malicious.
- Install and use only known and trusted software (see: no admin access).
- Configure remote-access software based on the organization's requirements and recommendations.
- Help customers evaluate the PC's security on an ongoing basis, such as by changing passwords regularly and periodically checking the status of security software.

One interesting idea in the NIST draft is to consider deploying separate network segments for BYOD users — especially if the customer allows non-employees like contractors, business partners and vendors on the network — instead of mingling organization and personal devices on the same system.

Essentially, there are two ways to provision teleworking:

- Have all office resources on-premises and have employees access these via Secure Sockets Layer virtual private networks (SSL VPN), accessed via a modern web browser.
- Place all the apps in the cloud, relying on the cloud provider to provide acceptable levels of physical and software security and backups as well as helping with compliance.

One thing experts agree on: Running apps in the cloud does not absolve the customer of security or compliance.

"Apps aren't perfect, either on-premises or in the cloud," says Christopher Crellin, senior director of product management at Intronis MSP Solutions, a **Barracuda Networks** company that provides data protection and security solutions for managed service providers. Look for firewalls that can examine traffic, do real-time antivirus checking and port blocking, even blocking a message containing specific words or strings. "These tools just as important on the cloud as on-premises," said Crellin.

Finally, as NIST's guidelines state, teleworkers need to be proactive. Besides understanding their employers' policies and requirements, they need to take ownership of protecting information. The need to educate workers about online security procedures cannot be overstressed, and it's a great opportunity for a value-added service.

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