

work online to grow your business

In recent years online systems have grown in popularity and, says Peter Winchester, with the many benefits of switching online it is easy to see why.

■ **The cost of updating and investing in IT can be a huge financial pitfall, especially with the current economic conditions compounding many small businesses' concerns. When moving systems online can decrease these concerns and risks, it is easy to see why so many people are taking advantages of the online options available.**

You may already have heard of software and services moving online and being accessed through the internet. Using software online, commonly known as 'cloud computing' or Software as a Service (SaaS) has become far more widely accepted as the demand for it increases, along with the technology to support it.

multiple benefits

There are many advantages to using an online system including the ability to access from anywhere in the world at a time that suits you, no software to install, no concerns regarding the latest updates and no software version compatibility problems. Add to this the ability to share data in real time and a reduction in the time wasted trying to configure, repair or replace IT systems and the benefits to businesses become much clearer.

Despite the numerous advantages, doubts are often raised surrounding the security of online systems. 'I remember when I started in practice some 22 years ago' says Jason Holden, director of Holden Associates, 'the first practice I worked for had just started to offer its clients the chance to use, and be trained on, computerised accounting software. The reaction was, what about security? What if it goes wrong? In fact the "what if" arguments were not dissimilar then from what people are saying now about hosted software, yet we all

use software on our computers without even thinking, and how many have a back-up or disaster recovery procedure?'

Some of the benefits include:

- instant access to clients' books, receipts and cash flow
- business services include: bookkeeping, payroll, call answering, credit control, website design, online marketing
- enhanced data security
- no installation or upgrades
- compatible with all current computers, browsers and operating systems
- eco friendly
- 24 hour live support

national client base?

What if, like Holden Associates, you advise and support clients throughout the UK? How do you communicate with and successfully advise customers without having to travel excessively?

'Cloud computing caught our attention as a solution to help us deal with our nationally based customers and frequent travelling employees, we just weren't sure what was available,' continued Jason. 'We discovered WinWeb's OnlineOffice and soon realised the numerous other benefits available to us'.

'OnlineOffice is a complete small business infrastructure, with its service offerings it is helping me build a practice and helping my clients focus on business, not business admin,' says Jason. 'With a cash flow tool to aid

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planning, web hosting, website design, data storage, email, calendar and much more it really is an office in the clouds.'

enhancing your reputation

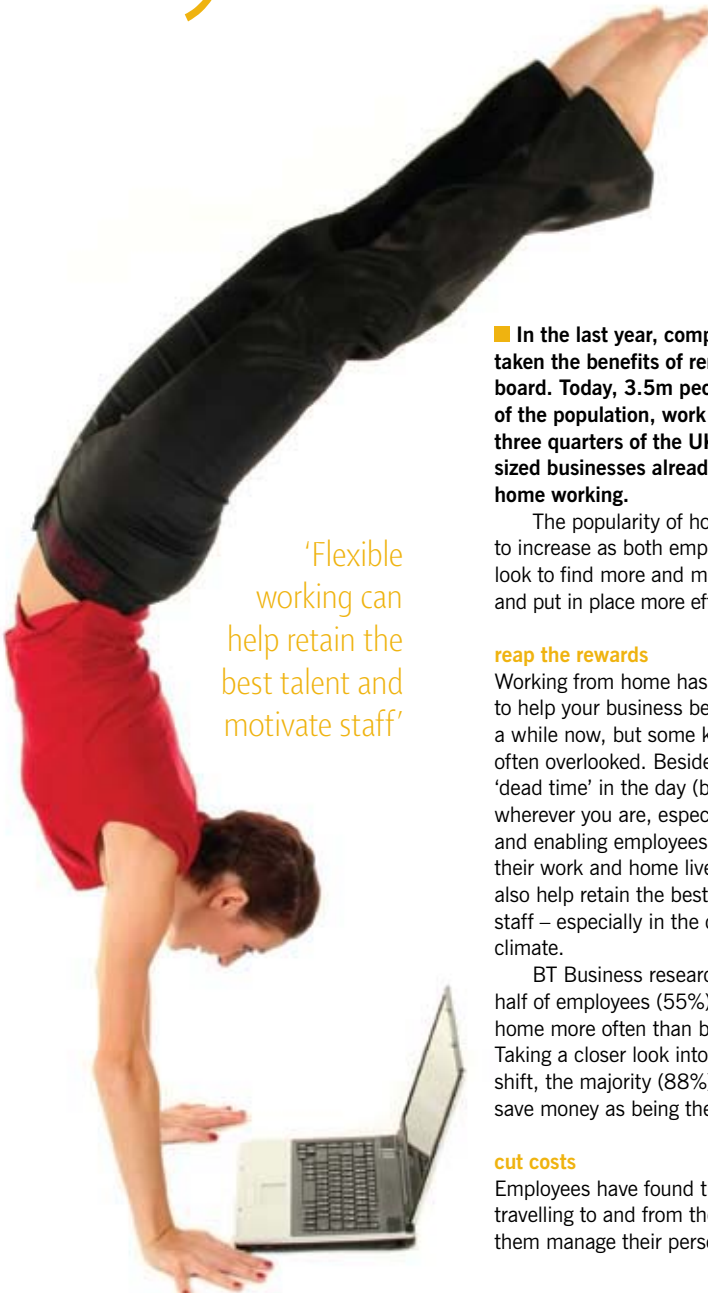
Jason went on to say, 'Holden Associates are becoming known more and more as a firm of online accountants, who no matter where you are based are capable of acting for you. With OnlineOffice we have access to all our clients' data in real time, meaning we can fulfill the role of a "virtual" financial director during business hours from our offices. With 24/7 live support, WinWeb fulfills the role of supporting our clients when we are not here, giving peace of mind to both us and our clients.'

Cloud computing is only going to become more popular given the progress in online technology and the vast increase in access to the Internet. As an IT solution it carries with it cheap overheads and provides a great tool for communication with customers and colleagues. Next time your 'market leading' offline software needs an inconvenient update or crashes unrepentantly, spare a thought for those using cloud computing focusing on their business instead. ■

Peter Winchester –partner operations manager, WinWeb www.winweb.com

stay flexible

Mick Hegarty looks at why, in the current economic conditions, working from home has become a popular option for both employee and employer.



'Flexible working can help retain the best talent and motivate staff'

■ In the last year, companies have really taken the benefits of remote working on board. Today, 3.5m people, nearly one eighth of the population, work from home and nearly three quarters of the UK's small and medium sized businesses already operate some form of home working.

The popularity of home working is only set to increase as both employees and businesses look to find more and more ways to cut costs, and put in place more efficient working patterns.

reap the rewards

Working from home has been hailed as a way to help your business be more productive for a while now, but some key benefits are still often overlooked. Besides effectively removing 'dead time' in the day (by allowing you to work wherever you are, especially when travelling) and enabling employees to more easily integrate their work and home lives, flexible working can also help retain the best talent and motivate staff – especially in the current economic climate.

BT Business research confirms that over half of employees (55%) are working from home more often than before the downturn. Taking a closer look into the reasons behind this shift, the majority (88%) pointed to the need to save money as being the main motivator.

cut costs

Employees have found that cutting the cost of travelling to and from the office can really help them manage their personal finances. Travel

is a significant outlay for almost every UK household, especially as we have seen petrol and train ticket prices climb even higher in recent years. It is no surprise then that nearly half of respondents believe they can save around £10 to £20 per day by not travelling to work. And, that's not the only saving; almost a third (31%) of UK employees also cited that they can save £250 a year as they no longer need to buy as many work clothes.

Anything employers can do to help staff morale in the current climate will be appreciated. As businesses tighten their belts, offering staff the chance to save money via flexible working is becoming a powerful incentive. In fact, according to recent BT Business research, one in three UK workers would choose flexible working options ahead of a pay rise.

supporting enterprises

It's important to keep the UK's entrepreneurial spirit alive so that the UK economy can emerge stronger. Opening new doors by supporting enterprise built on fresh ideas and operating smarter and more flexible working patterns will be central to this. BT Business is seeing an impetus from companies turning to smarter, more streamlined and effective working strategies - and flexible working is emerging on top. With the right technology and know-how, businesses of all sizes can reap the rewards. ■

Mick Hegarty – strategy and commercial director, BT Business