Does Telecommuting Work?

In December, we asked our readers whether their companies have a policy on telecommuting and if they are telecommuters themselves. Here's what they said. (For an overview of this issue, see page 30.)

We are actively exploring the possibilities of using ISDN to provide both telephone service from our switch and data services off our Novell network. This would provide one of our employees with a virtual office from her home, allowing her to tend to a personal situation while she continues to manage her payroll and accounting responsibilities. The cost of implementation will be far outweighed by the fact that we will be able to maintain our relationship with her.

Bruce Barnes
Chicago, IL

At SCO, a lot of people do at least part of their job by telecommuting. We have development sites all over the world. In some instances, employees telecommute to another country. The combination of technology infrastructure available to our people and the types of high-tech jobs we have lead me to believe we will have more telecommuters over time.

Alok Mohan
Santa Cruz, CA

Our company allows its employees to telecommute when appropriate. Much of our business is international, covering many time zones, so it is often as easy to work from home, responding via e-mail, telephone and fax. I manage our marketing group, and my employees telecommute several times each month.

Kevin Payne
San Jose, CA

My company's policy about telecommuting is summed up in one word: fear. Over 90 percent of my job could be done from home, and I wouldn't be looking for employment elsewhere if they would adapt to accommodating this reasonable desire.

Jim Smith
Tallahassee, FL

I'm the director of a department that runs many servers for time-sharing, file-serving and printing, and I am looking to formalize our "policies" on telecommuting. With most servers running seven days a week, 24 hours a day, there is ample need for support staff to access systems at off hours. We have long had informal arrangements with some staff—providing modems and some systems for home use. Now we will be providing complete systems with the express purpose of enabling support staff to work from home.

Robert R. Pescinski
New Brunswick, NJ

We are running several pilot projects in this area, but I am not involved with telecommuting today. Most issues I see involve "relating" with others and the social implications on the work force. We do business better with people we know and understand. Telecommuting will only make us more isolated without extra steps to bring people together regularly.

Janet L. Rimlinger
King of Prussia, PA

We have some employees that telecommute. With the advent of ISDN lines, more have started to work from home. Most of them are partners or traders that need access to the market 24 hours a day. The start-up cost for an ISDN connection is expensive, but the long-term payoff is reduced absenteeism, less time spent commuting, and less reimbursement expense for weekend work.

David Warm
New York, NY

My department at the University of North Carolina allows for telecommuting at the employee's discretion but provides no support for it. We use dial-up modems from the pool supported by the university, and connect to whatever machine(s) we are working on.

Dennis R. Sherman
Chapel Hill, NC

We have a total staff of 30 but only eight are at company headquarters. The remainder telecommute exclusively.

Rob Kolstad
Colorado Springs, CO

Our company is starting a pilot program for IT to test telecommuting. Most of the sales force telecommutes now, and it has been successful.

Pamela S. Dunsky
Miamisburg, OH

As a small consulting company (not exactly self-employed but close), we use telecommuting to support clients, and we are involved in developing telecommuting environments for clients.

Ofer Sheinkin
Natanya, Israel

My company has been investigating this matter. Although there have been numerous committees and endless announcements, I am unaware of any telecommuters coming on board. I feel this is due mostly to reluctance by senior management to let workers out of their sight. Because system personnel like programmers would be a natural fit for telecommuting, if management cannot tolerate these mostly unstructured employees

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working at home, there is little hope they would do so for others.

David Philippe
Palatine, IL

We think telecommuting is a great idea that will truly come into its own when the phone companies can offer massive, cheap bandwidth to homes and small offices. Until then, we'll be limited to persons who can work on limited projects, such as a report that can be downloaded and worked on, then returned (uploaded) when finished.

Tony Friend
Corte Madera, CA

We are a virtual company. We have professionals that work in Colorado, San Francisco, Tucson, San Luis Obispo and San Jose. Telecommuting works when you have a group of dedicated people that have worked together and understand each other.

Gary Halvorsen
Arroyo Grande, CA

I am a member of a network integrator and consultancy with over 3,000 employees, most of whom I have never seen. (I have been to our headquarters once this year.) I rely extensively on telecommuting both for activity internal to our firm and in support of clients.

Richard Henkus
Philadelphia, PA

Our firm has offices along the West Coast with "headquarters" in San Francisco. Our senior managers, managers and partners are supportive of telecommuting. We do not have a rigid policy on telecommuting dos and don'ts; it is left up to our own judgment and discretion on how best and when to telecommute. With busy schedules and large amounts of travel, telecommuting definitely enhances my productivity.

Derek R. Thomas
Portland, OR

My company is working on such a policy. We have a couple of employees who dial in about three days a week, more or less as a pilot project. It seems that our telecommuting employees wind up coming in on supposed home days fairly often.

Will Morse
Houston, TX

My company has a very informal/nonexistent policy toward telecommuting. If there is work you can accomplish at home and a good reason why you can't complete it at work (e.g., interruptions), talk to your manager. If you have a reasonable manager, you may be able to work at home one or two days to complete the assignment. I believe the
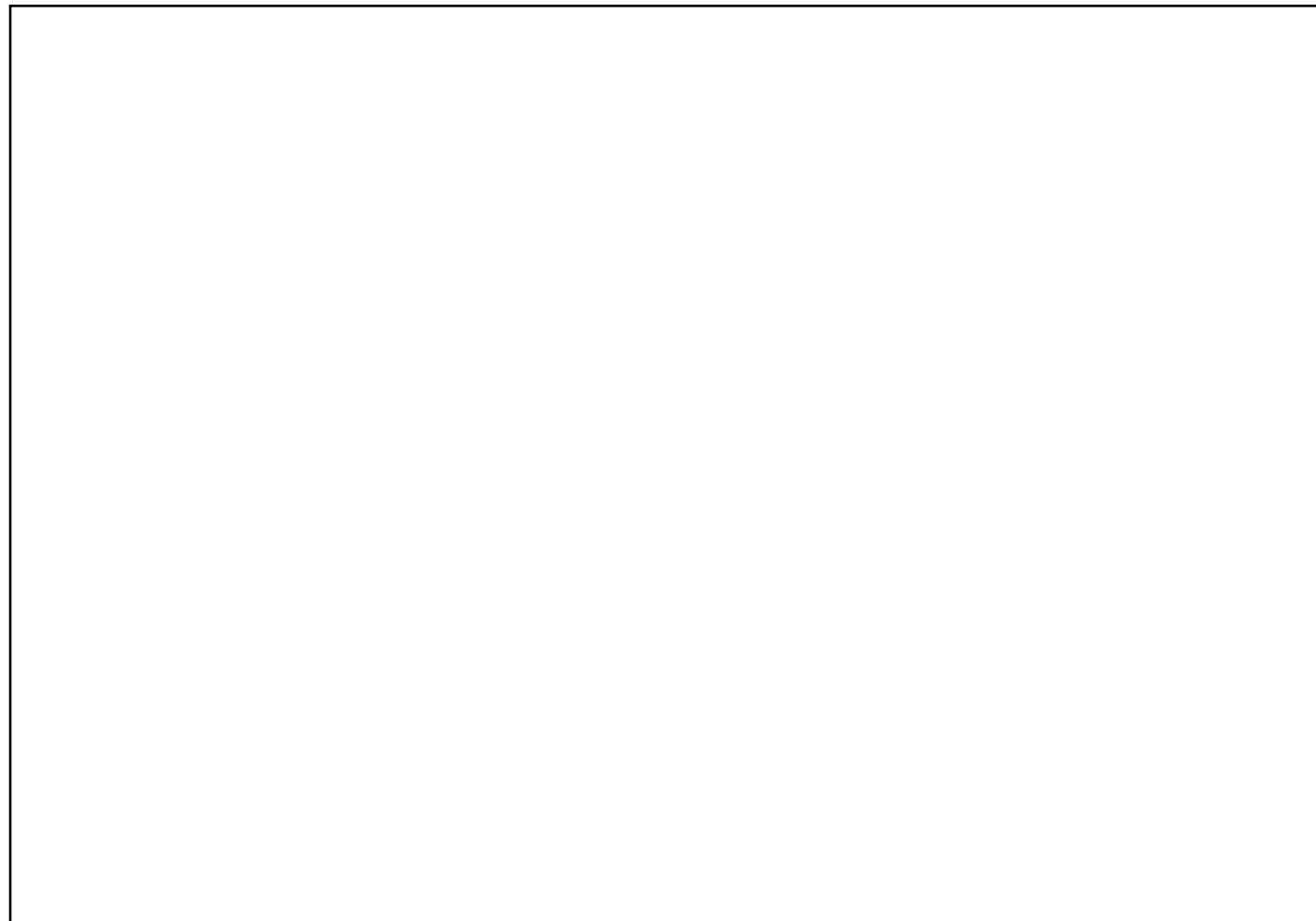
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entrenched managerial belief that "If I can't see them working, then they aren't working" is the biggest obstacle to telecommuting in my company.

Melissa Fawn Bull
Evanston, IL

My company has an internal policy regarding telecommuting and a vigorous telecommuting program. (I am writing this reply in my home office.) Telecommuting is great, but forethought about how to and who should telecommute can make or break a new program.

Dave Weist
Ann Arbor, MI

Our company implemented telecommuting at the beginning of 1995. Four of us carry notebooks with Ethernet plus modem PCMCIA cards in order to work from our homes or while traveling,

and to connect to the network when we are in one of the company locations. Our customers have access to our Unix boxes remotely via dial-up lines for e-mail and to

search our Unix Q&A database.

Marcelo Gardelin
Buenos Aires, Argentina

IT

Next Time Around

Here is our new question. It is addressed particularly to users, independent software vendors and systems integrators.

What difference have the Single UNIX Specification (formerly Spec 1170 and UNIX '95) and/or the Common Desktop Environment (CDE) made to you and your company? Are these initiatives of practical help in multivendor computing environments? Please note which of the above categories you fit in and tell us how the technologies have impacted (or have not) the kind of work you do.

As usual, send your unadulterated opinions to pubs@uniforum.org. Please keep your replies brief (about 100 words), and send them to us by Mar. 1. If you're a member, new or old, and we don't have your e-mail address, please send it to the address above, and we'll add you to the distribution list. We look forward to hearing your views.