



## OUT OF OFFICE

There's more to getting home-working right than you might think, finds **Ben Willis**

**Among the many** advances brought about by the internet and communications technology are the increased opportunities for remote working. With just a phone line and computer, workers in certain sectors can theoretically work from anywhere.

According to figures published last year by the Office for National Statistics, one in 10 workers now opt to work from home, up more than a third in a decade. Studies regularly show that working from home is more productive than working in an office, saving workers commuting time and preventing burnout by giving them more time to relax and sleep. And, of course, having fewer staff based in an office means employers can save on office space, greatly reducing their overheads.

Indeed, the benefits of a decentralised, networked way of working to a modern organisation seem to far outweigh the drawbacks. *Professional Manager* caught up with Xenios Thrasyvoulou, who, as chief executive of online freelancer marketplace People Per Hour, is a vocal tub-thumper for the many possibilities opened up by remote working. He describes how managing a remote workforce can work and, if done properly, can allow radically new and liberating ways of doing business.

### Work optimally

One of the main benefits of having a remote team is that it allows individual members of the team to work in an environment and at a time that best suits them.

"We all work entirely remotely, and once you get used to it, it's a

lot more efficient," Thrasyvoulou says of his own organisation. "It's less structured and more flexible to your optimum way of working. When you're on calls you get your stuff done quicker, but when you're not you don't have people around you to distract you."

His company has also abandoned traditional working hours, with team members working in the "time zones" they feel most comfortable in. "Some people are early birds, some are late. We don't have times like nine to five; people just get stuff done. I

marketer, and that person I manage to find at the best possible cost and with the best possible skills is in China, I can now hire that person very easily and integrate them into this network.

"If you think of organisations traditionally, their hiring has been confined to the local community. How can you compete in a globally integrated economy if your hiring is confined to a little town?"

### Work differently

Of course, having staff in many countries does present some

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don't care what time you work; we just set targets and people meet those targets. If you can do them in three hours because you're a genius, then great for you."

### Get the best people

Another major advantage of a networked way of working, Thrasyvoulou says, is that it greatly increases the pool of individuals from which companies can hire, allowing them to compete globally without having to open up offices all over the world.

"If you think about it, if you're a networked organisation, rather than just the classic office-based organisation, you can basically get the best people in the world, wherever they may be," he explains. "So if I need to get someone who is a hyper-specialised search engine

logistical complexities, but none of these is insurmountable.

The technology to allow remote working pretty much takes care of itself, with tools such as Skype, Citrix GoToMeeting, Google Chat and others allowing instantaneous communications and face-to-face videoconferencing. And, in terms of managing a remote workforce, Thrasyvoulou says a few simple changes in working culture work best – for example, keeping meetings to a minimum.

Even before his company abandoned office working and went remote, Thrasyvoulou says he had sought to tackle the culture of excessively long meetings by banning chairs from meeting rooms. This philosophy he has now taken



### Further information

To find out more about People Per Hour, go to [www.peopleperhour.com](http://www.peopleperhour.com)



Have you ever dreamt of working remotely from a paradise location?

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into his company's remote-working phase.

"It's basically about snapping out of the idea that you need to have meetings," he says. "Meetings are a big driver of inefficiency in big companies. The beauty of online conferencing is that, because you are on a computer, you're forced to keep meetings short anyway. You can't sit around and mingle with people."

### No need for discipline

In terms of remotely disciplining errant staff, Thrasyvoulou claims to have got around the need for this by turning the worker-manager relationship on its head. Rather than acting as boss, he instead plays the role of client. Straight away that changes the dynamic and almost entirely eradicates the sort of behaviour that normally requires discipline in an office environment.

"I told my team, 'Don't think of me as your boss, think of me as your customer,'" he says. "And the relationship becomes more

effective. They won't come to me and say, 'I was sick today, I didn't get it done.' You don't go and tell your customer that. The moment they become a provider, all that goes out of the window, because you do not instinctively go to your customer and tell them all these things. You just need to deliver quality work to get more work. It keeps you accountable and keeps you on your toes."

Thrasyvoulou believes remote, networked working will become not just more common in the future, but the standard way of doing business. Not only does it tick all the boxes in terms of outcomes, but also liberates previously office-bound staff.

"People want freedom," he says. "Now you can make that transition. And the benefits to organisations are massive. You cut the fat, you cut the bureaucracy and the time-wasting, and you create an efficient network of people who are best in class. By doing that, you can beat the results of any traditional organisation."

## WHAT I'VE LEARNED

### Mario King

*The founder of digital marketing firm King & D'earth has discovered the importance of learning from failure*



**Make the most of the resources you have available to you.** One of the things we learned on CMI Level 3 Award in First Line Management was to be aware of what resources you have available to you to solve a problem. Then use them. When I took the initial plunge and started up my business, making use of the resources I had available to me at the time really helped me muster the courage I needed.

**Failure is feedback.** When I was trying to find investors, I had many knock-backs. The thing I realised about failing was that it's all to do with the way you perceive different things. In hindsight, I realise that a lot of the rejections I had were useful feedback. When people experience failure they might get embarrassed, and think, "I'm not worthy," and tell themselves a lot of negative internal stories.

**I had to become a bigger person.** That's what these challenges do - they encourage you to become a bigger person. I started looking at ways of improving my mental image. Failure is a formative process that we ultimately benefit from. People give up too soon and I was nearly one of them, but what kept me going was that I have a vision for my firm.

**Relationships are at the heart of what I do.** Some people would say that you don't need to put as much effort into customer service internet businesses. In my view, you need to provide 10 times the amount of customer service because people's trust in the internet wavers when data protection is neglected by rogue companies.

**If you help enough other people get what they want, you will get what you want.** I heard a speaker say that once and that was my banner - my credo - when I was starting out and it still is. If I can get enough other people what they want, I know that what my company and I want will take care of itself. That's what I live by on a day-to-day basis. I don't always stick to it, but each day I get closer.