



Working From Home: Employer, Employee and Environmental Issues

White Paper

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1. Introduction

Technology has begun to change established office-based working patterns. Little more than a decade ago many employers and their personnel would have thought it impractical for people to be based at home or other non-office locations, either permanently or occasionally. In 2007 it is a common issue on the agendas of many board meetings.

Flexible working - the trend towards remote working patterns and greater flexibility about working hours – is a conversation topic for many employees and consequently has found its way into the boardroom. Some UK companies have enabled flexible working practices for years and having a largely roving workforce that at any time may be based in the office, working from home, or working from any number of locations.

Other employers have enabled a smaller degree of home working arrangements for certain members of staff, while some companies do not enable any remote working and prefer to have a workforce that is office-based or works from pre-determined sites.

The reality is that flexible working – and working from home in particular – does not suit every organisation or every employee. Yet as more and more people express a willingness or desire to work from home and organisations begin to explore the practical implications of moving away from establishing office-based working patterns, home working continues to gain popularity.

Today new, more powerful communications tools make home and remote working patterns more practical than ever. As the challenges of maintaining social interaction and encouraging team collaboration are addressed by new technologies, so the barriers for some organisations' home and flexible working ambitions are lowering.

No longer tied to desks, people are on the move. Flexitime and teleworking have become more accepted in many organisations, and out-of-office working is increasingly having to be supported by corporate communications infrastructures and services. Whether they are working off site, while travelling, at home, at desks other than their own or anywhere within a building, employees expect and are expected to be in touch. Wherever they are, they want access to the full range of corporate communications services and functions. They want and need to be able to read emails, send voice or text messages, check diaries and access product / sales / ordering systems among other applications.

In July 2007, ntl:Telewest Business conducted a nation-wide UK poll to determine attitudes towards home working, its uptake, whether it was perceived as an environmental issue and what both the personal and business benefits of home working could be. This white paper presents a brief summary of the implications of home working for employers, employees and the environment, citing some of the findings of the survey*.

* Telephone survey of 1,000 UK adults by GFK/NOP, 6-8 July 2007

2. Home Working in Britain Today

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), approximately 31.5 million people are employed in the UK today. The official working age begins at 16 and finishes at 59 for women, 64 for men.

Statistics about the extent of home or flexible working in the UK are much more difficult to come by. The most recent published analysis from the ONS dates back to 1999 and found that around 24 per cent of full-time female employees in the UK had 'flexible' working patterns, compared with around 15 per cent of men. When asked specifically about home working, around 3.6 per cent of women in employment mainly worked from home compared with 1.4 per cent of men.

Working at home, whether permanently or occasionally, has undoubtedly gained much ground in the eight years since. The advent of broadband to many UK homes, the digitisation of more business processes and the increasing popularity of home working to enhance work/life balance are factors often referenced by observers and the media.

The business benefits are typically less well documented, although organisations that are advocates of home-based working arrangements tend to cite factors such as:

- **Productivity:** a typical response from home workers when asked why occasional home working benefits them is that they can be more productive when working without the typical distractions of a busy office environment
- **Resourcing:** the UK's crowded road and rail networks mean that many employees typically choose to live within a realistic commuting distance of their place of work. Introducing a home working policy can extend the pool of talent available to an organisation as distance from the office is less of a constraining factor
- **Work/life balance:** commuting in many parts of the UK can bring with it unpredictable journey times, crowded conditions and, after a long day, a very late return home. Reducing or eliminating commuting through home working practices can give individuals more family and leisure time

A home working study conducted in July 2007 for ntl:Telewest Business also questioned a cross-section of the UK public about the implications and perceived implications of home working on health, stress levels, the environmental impact of commuting, family and personal life considerations, career decisions and views on the provision of home working arrangements by employers. The findings provide useful insight into the perception of the UK workforce towards home working, the practicalities of office-based working today and the burdens of commuting.

3. Employer Implications

The practicalities and benefits of home working for the employer clearly depend on the nature of the organisation. A construction company, for example, would find it extremely difficult for the majority of its personnel to be home-based, even for a day. A services-led business, for example one providing business information to other businesses, would be likely to find home working highly attractive because its activities are largely driven by the sharing of information.

As such, it is difficult to generalise about the effect that home working practices may or may not have on an organisation that is reviewing its options. If some degree of home working is already allowed, then the employer could easily go about measuring the commercial impact, assuming that staff were previously all office based – productivity, responsiveness, attendance and office overheads are all tangibles that can be assessed via straightforward analysis of profit and loss accounts over time.

Broadly speaking though, the implications for the employer of introducing home working or increasing the level of home working centre on two issues. These are the maintenance of a more satisfied and productive workforce, and the ability to reduce the operational costs associated with maintaining an office-based workforce. Beyond that, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) ⁽¹⁾ advises that many of the responsibilities which employers have for maintaining office premises also apply to personnel working from home, particularly in the provision of computers and peripheral equipment. Normally, these regulations will have already been addressed in the provision of that equipment for office use, but employers still have a duty to ensure that they are compliant.

Commuting

The ntl:Telewest Business survey found that 70 per cent of UK workers questioned were permanently office-based. It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of the workforce continues to have to travel to and from a place of work each day, but the fact that almost a third of people now work from home in some way implies that the flexible revolution has come a long way in a relatively short amount of time. Moreover, it suggests that employers may be able to draw talent from a wider geographic area, as increased levels of home working imply there is, or in future will be, less of a need for people to live within a comfortable daily commuting distance of the office. With increased home working, people are likely to take the view that occasional longer commutes are bearable if they are offset by days spent working at home.

With the regular working week in the UK defined as 37.5 hours, commuting has a significant impact on the free time of the country's workforce. The ntl:Telewest Business survey found that five per cent of people estimated they would save more than 20 hours a week by not commuting. In total, 22 per cent said their commuting time was between five and 20 hours a week.

1 Health and Safety Executive, 'Homeworking', first published 1996 updated 2006

The survey highlighted two principal employer benefits that a reduction in commuting time would deliver. The first was perhaps an obvious one – improved work/life balance, putting the employer in a position to be able to take positive steps to help offset the strains of the working week by helping to create more personal time.

Typical concerns of managers when home working schemes are introduced are that employees will ultimately do less work and that visibility of what work they are actually doing will be lost. Of course, widespread home working is impossible for an employer without a degree of trust in the workforce. Equally though, communications technology now keeps employees in touch with their colleagues digitally to the extent that it would be very straightforward to identify when someone was not working as expected.

Yet the survey indicated that personnel are actually unlikely to be less busy while working from home. They would perform their normal working duties and then spend the commuting time saved on personal activities. Asked how working from home rather than being tied to a daily commute could or has changed their lifestyle, the top answer in the survey was spending more time with family (72%), followed by saving money through not commuting (65%), allowing more time for a relationship (59%) and giving greater control over workload and resultant stress (54%). The next highest answer was the ability to reduce environmental impact by not commuting, indicating that employers can also increase their social responsibility in the eyes of their staff by enabling more home working.

Overheads

A substantial proportion of the overheads of a typical UK business is dedicated to the ongoing maintenance of offices. Rent is the relative tip of the iceberg, with insurances, utilities, local taxes, cleaning, facilities and associated service charges combining to add pressure to the profit line.

As technology - particularly the mobile phone, but also broadband, wireless networks and mobile email applications - has evolved in the past 15 years or more, so people have become more mobile in their daily working lives. Consequently, the time that many employees spend away from their offices during working hours has tended to increase anyway, as technology makes communicating with colleagues back in the office more practical.

This has resulted in the ongoing investment in some premises delivering less relative value for organisations, as desks are not always occupied by a person for many hours of the day or week, although the cost of maintaining those desks remains constant. The ntl:Telewest Business survey found that despite 70 per cent of people stating that they did not work from home at all, much of the UK's office space is seemingly underutilised. Just two in five people said the desks in their building were all or mostly occupied. A further 11 per cent said that hardly any of the desks in their office were occupied. Competitive pressures only ever increase and there is a need to identify cost savings, so there is a clear opportunity for unnecessary office overheads to be reduced through increased home working, where appropriate.

Health and Wellbeing

The rate at which mild illnesses can spread around the workplace or a household is hardly a revelation. Yet with UK companies losing billions of pounds each year through employee absenteeism, some of which would undoubtedly be reduced through more home working, the health and wellness considerations of more flexible working arrangements rarely get the same attention as many of the other purported benefits.

According to the ntl:Telewest Business study, increased home working could have a direct impact upon workforce productivity purely because staff would feel well enough to work from home on days that they consider themselves too ill to attempt the journey into the office. More than half (57%) of the people questioned would work from home when ill rather than take a sick day if they had the option. A similar number (48%) said that not having the stress and exertion of commuting made or would make them feel healthier.

These findings indicate that by facilitating more flexible working practices, employers could significantly reduce the amount of time that members of staff take off due to illness, and hence lower the financial impact that absence has on the organisation. There were other health considerations for commuters too, with 39 per cent of those questioned stating that they would be ill less if they worked from home as they would not be exposed to office germs.

Personal Productivity

Productivity is one of the most widely recognised commercial benefits of home working. For pressured employees working in a fast-changing business environment, the ability to tackle builds-ups of particular types of work that require concentration without some of the distractions of a busy office, a little time working from home can make workloads more manageable. For people based permanently at home, if work is well allocated and resources are well managed then the degree of work focus can undoubtedly increase. Meanwhile, new technologies that support more collaborative remote working practices are addressing the lack of social interaction that home workers can cite as a drawback.

Seven out of 10 people questioned for ntl:Telewest Business said that they believed home working would allow them to get more done during the working day compared to their normal productivity level in the office. Cutting out, or down on, commuting was also seen as a positive move for productivity, and some employees appear willing to spend some of the time saved on finishing work tasks. More than a fifth (21%) believed they would get more work done due to the time saved by not commuting.

Office distractions are familiar to anyone working in a modern, busy, typically open plan environment. Working from home would help to ensure that personnel suffer fewer distractions during the working day. Gossip about social lives and general banter was ranked top of the list of workplace distractions in the survey, with 40 per cent. Impromptu meetings and interruptions caused by colleagues were also a recognised distraction by 11 per cent of people.

Home working will fail to enhance personal productivity if the tools fail though. Organisations enabling their teams to work from home should audit their equipment and regulate their home communication services to ensure that people have not only computers and phones that at least match what they have in the office, but that their network connection speeds are sufficient too. To ensure that the same business applications are available, employers need to consider rolling out technologies such as a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to ensure that remote staff can connect securely and at high speed to all the resources that reside on office networks.

A final consideration for businesses is that if more home working was allowed or enabled, employees in certain industries would be more able to fit their working hours around the specific requirements of their role or sector. Whereas normal daily working hours are largely governed by the standard opening hours of an office or other business premises, home based workers can have greater flexibility, providing they are able to meet the expectations of their customers or clients. In the survey, more than two thirds (69%) felt that home working could allow them to start earlier or later than a normal office day in order to better match their hours to their job requirements, their personal circumstances, or both.

4. Personnel Implications

A cynic might say that most employees would rather work at home, where supervisors are not able to observe their movements, than in an office. Loss of visibility and control over workforce productivity is a common home working concern. Despite seven in 10 people surveyed being purely office-based though, there were many clear merits of home working. With effective controls, clear policies and appropriate visibility, the management case for home working appears highly compelling, given the array of advantages.

Health and Wellbeing

The previous section has outlined the health and wellbeing implications for employers, and their potential impact on workforce productivity. The same issues suggest clear benefits for employees – many believe that more home working and less commuting can make a positive contribution to their health and reduce their stress levels.

These issues, namely the spreading of germs in office environments, the exertion of daily commuting and the widely-held view that work can be done from home on days when illness prevents a day in the office, create an obvious case for home working. Yet there are less obvious benefits too. Almost half (45%) of people surveyed said home working would cause them to spend more time on personal fitness and going to the gym, thanks to less commuting time.

Diet

Healthy eating has been increasingly prominent on social and governmental agendas in recent years. Workplace meals and snacks are rarely considered in isolation from overall dietary habits. In a pressured office environment with time at a premium, lunch can be a hurried affair or even overlooked, with food choices tending to be governed by what is available during a quick lunch break rather than, necessarily, what is best to contribute towards a healthy lifestyle. In turn, an office worker would rarely have the luxury of much preparation time for lunch, and tempting snacks could be equally available.

The ntl:Telewest Business survey showed that working at home could have a positive impact on diets. Half of those questioned would eat less fatty or pre-packed food, 49 per cent would eat less food overall, 42 per cent would consume less snacks and 36 per cent would drink less caffeine. Women were more likely (56%) to eat less fatty food than men (47%).

The likely benefits of home working compared to office routines go beyond diet though. The increased time available for keeping fit is outlined elsewhere in this document, but home workers also tend to be less likely to have lunch at their desks, instead preferring to take a short break in the kitchen or go out of the house for a while. By being more productive during working spells, home workers can have greater scope for taking the breaks that office workers can skip, and that are beneficial to their health.

Family and Relationships

Having more time to spend with the family is increasingly considered to be one of the most important elements of work/life balance. The largest single impact that home working can have in this area is a reduction in commuting time required.

For employees with children, the ability to spend more time at home with them and less on a train or in a car is an obvious benefit of home working. But the family-oriented benefits are broader than that, including things such as more time to spend with elderly relatives, more time to attend children's school events and more time to visit other relations. Nearly three quarters of those people surveyed said that home working did or would give them more time for their families in general. Similar to the point already made about aligning work hours to job role or personal circumstances, home working was seen by 42 per cent of people as an ideal way to fit workload around school and nursery times. Equally, home workers could choose to take a break to spend time with children after they return from school, then finish work later in the evening after they've gone to bed.

Leisure time created through home working was seen as positive for relationships, whether those be existing ones or potential ones. Almost two thirds (59%) believed that working from home would give them more time to devote to their relationships.

Interaction

For every home worker who praises the lack of interruptions to be had when working away from the office, it is normally not difficult to find another one who misses having colleagues around them and can feel isolated from the general goings-on of the organisation. In a busy working environment, most teams find that there is more to completing tasks than simply being able to communicate information, as a degree of human interaction can aid understanding, avoid confusion and make individuals feel both involved and valued.

For employees who particularly feel that interaction in person is an important part of their ability to do their job, home working would typically have to be combined with periods in the office, or confined to days when it would be far more effective for them to work from home. The ntl:Telewest Business survey asked about some of the perceived difficulties of working from home and the top answer (56%) was the lack of social interaction, followed by difficulties in collaborating over projects or new ideas (27%), feeling less in touch with the company generally (22%) and suffering slow access to the corporate network (18%).

Technology is continually improving the interaction that home workers have with their colleagues in the office. Whereas in the past home working has largely meant phone and email contact only, multimedia services now enable effective video conferencing, collaborative instant messaging, indicators that show where colleagues are and so on. Ultimately there is no substitute for direct human interaction, but technology is rapidly narrowing the gap between having a colleague sat next to you and having a colleague working many miles away.

5. Environmental Considerations

In the past couple of years, fast-growing concerns over climate change have forced environmental responsibility far higher up the corporate agenda and have made many individuals consider lifestyle changes that can help to reduce, amongst other factors, carbon emissions. Reducing commuting can have a direct impact on the environment, particularly where commuting is normally by car, and predominantly by lone drivers. Equally, the environmental impact of offices and other commercial premises is a major consideration.

Home working is therefore a matter that should be prominent on the green agendas of citizens and organisations. Yet there is a questionmark over to what extent they have so far made the connection.

Employer Action

Many employers across the UK are taking action to reduce the impact that their daily operations have upon the environment. The question is whether home working has become a conscious part of those plans by introducing or extending working from home practices. In many cases, the provision of home working to employees may be driven more by issues such as productivity enhancement, staff retention and cost cutting than the environment.

It is clear, though, that more home working can reduce environmental harm. In introducing greener policies and initiatives, many UK employers have already considered how they are perceived by their personnel and all external stakeholders in doing so. There is increasingly a case for making home working an integral part of the 'green' agenda for businesses as they work to reduce their environmental impact.

The ntl:Telewest Business survey found that many people thought their employers could be doing a lot more to be greener, and equally many saw home working as a key consideration for the green agenda. Reducing the consumption of power and consumables in offices was seen as the key green consideration for employers (54%), but enabling more home working (49%) was also a priority. Reducing travel to business meetings was also seen as important (46%). Overall though, opinion was divided on whether working from home was an important green issue, with 46 per cent agreeing that it was. Just 35 per cent believed their employer was doing enough to be a greener organisation. This perception may result from people considering other factors to have a larger environmental impact, but given the road and rail congestion that commuting in the UK undeniably causes, it is clear that more home working would be positive for the planet.

Commuting Impact

While the environmental impact of commuting may be obvious, most employees still do not see it as the most important driver of home working practices. Attitudes to this may change over time, but the money and time saved, and personal wellbeing benefits of spending less time getting to and from work, are currently seen as more important.

UK citizens readily admit that they could be doing more to help the environment. Just 40 per cent of those surveyed said that they did more than their employer to be green, while they also believed their employer should be doing more for the environment too. There is clearly, therefore, a need for more education about the environmental impact of commuting. While some personnel have little or no alternative other than to be office-based, greater take up of home working practices by employees and employers would make a sizeable contribution in the quest to reduce carbon emissions, and also lessen travel congestion.

There could be other green implications for a reduction in commuting too. Whereas working parents with children at local schools typically have to struggle to get them to the classroom on time, causing congestion through the morning 'school run', home workers could have the time to walk with their children. While many offices are in urban areas and so a short walk from the nearest sandwich outlet, many others are not and personnel are compelled to drive some distance to get lunch. Home working would reduce the journey to a short walk to the kitchen.

Individual Contributions

Equally, education is required to create a greater understanding of the environmental benefits of home working in the context of what much of the UK believes to be important to the green agenda. For many people, recycling is one of the most important things that they can do to be greener. That is certainly true, and the ongoing debate about the frequency of household refuse collections and recycling initiatives undertaken by local authorities across the country have created further awareness of the need for more recycling.

Survey responses certainly endorsed this. Recycling at home was cited as the biggest single contribution that individuals can make to the environment by 45 per cent of people. Yet the impact of commuting and the contribution that the workforce can make by reducing it has also become widely recognised, with 24 per cent stating that commuting and other work-related travel was the most critical green factor. Recycling in the office was also referenced, with seven per cent.

6. Technologies for Flexible Working

Technologies that enable people to work while away from the office have come a long way since the arrival of modems, the mobile phone or even more recently the availability of broadband in many parts of the UK. Teams of people working on the same project - whether that be a small internal initiative or the management of millions of customers around the world - need to be connected regardless of where they are, and connected in the same way, to the same applications.

Enabled by high speed, advanced networks, collaborative working is the face of today's business. Organisations in both the private and public sectors rely on it to satisfy the daily demands of their customers and citizens. Underpinning such fluid, flexible working practices are the platforms and tools which start at the core of next-generation networks and end in laptops, handheld and mobile devices. In between are the wired and wireless networks over which the latest multimedia communications services can now run.

These new architectures and technologies seamlessly extend all the features and functionality of corporate and government systems, including security, right down to even the smallest branch office or home. Introducing more home and remote working capabilities typically does require some improvements to corporate information systems, but they need not be extensive, depending on the capabilities of the existing networks and applications, and the communications services being used to connect them.

The introduction of new technologies to better support home and remote working is best undertaken after a thorough evaluation of the business benefits. Once the organisation is satisfied that it can achieve its desired goals, such as improved productivity, better work/life balance to help attract and retain talent, greater operational flexibility and lower overheads, it can then start to make decisions about which technologies are best suited to its specific requirements.

The following section outlines some of the key ntl:Telewest Business services for ensuring home workers have the right communication tools, can connect with colleagues and customers, and have resilient access. These services have the ability to support all manner of flexible working environments.

Work Essentials: Business Applications

IP Multimedia

IP Multimedia is one of the most exciting services for home workers in collaborative terms as it represents a significant leap forward in technology, allowing them to work at home in a way that overcomes many of the drawbacks of not being physically present in the office. IP Multimedia integrates video and phone calls, voicemail, email and the presence-based benefits of instant messaging into an online working environment that - providing an adequate broadband connection is used - can be used equally well in the office or from home. The service uses IP phones as well as a voice and video softphone application.

The main features are instant messaging, which provides a secure online 'talk' environment with correspondence displayed live; video calling and conferencing from PC to PC using web cameras. Additional features include IP telephony call and voicemail services supported by extensive phone directories; and presence indicators, providing a live list of which colleagues are available at any one time.

While video calls and instant messaging do not completely compensate for human interaction, the collaborative power of IP Multimedia is impressive and several of its features, particularly those that enable people to track each other down faster and 'meet' online, can actually be more effective than the conventional office formula of desk-bound work styles.

Conferencing

While a more advanced, multimedia option is now available, conferencing remains an effective tool for enabling dispersed teams to communicate by phone together and therefore collaborate better. ntl:Telewest Business offers a platform for telephone (TeleMeet) and web (WebMeet) conferencing that support up to 125 participants. These services can help to overcome some of the interaction drawbacks of working at home by making it easier to hold virtual meetings with colleagues, customers and suppliers anywhere in the world to share presentations, product launches, weekly meetings and training sessions.

Inbound Call Management

Inbound customer communications are rapidly becoming more complex. Customer phone calls still make up the majority of the mix for most organisations but channels like email, the web or even text messaging are also being used, creating challenges for how businesses and government bodies can deliver a consistent customer experience. Downward pressures on cost create challenges on how to support call volumes and maintain quality of service, for instance by moving traffic onto other channels or to overseas contact centres.

Technology is now available to assist home workers with these challenges though. The ntl:Telewest Business Inbound Call Management solutions enable organisations to establish highly effective virtual contact centres, with agents being home-based. A range of value-added services, including routing management, reporting, self-service, interactive services and fully integrated hosting solutions, enable employers to be better in control of inbound calls.

Using a web interface, call plans can be defined, modified, copied, activated and displayed in real time, so enabling home workers to be an integral part of the call handling team is easy. Customers are given administration rights to the online interface so that they can set up users and permission levels.

Many UK contact centres and multi-site organisations are moving away from costly customer premise equipment, which is time consuming and difficult to manage, and are now moving to network-based solutions, so that they can concentrate on their core business. Inbound Call Management means there is no capital expenditure required and no need for a dedicated in-house team.

Connecting Colleagues: Managed Data Services

MPLS IPVPN

IPVPN (Internet Protocol Virtual Private Network) with MPLS (Multi Protocol Label Switching) is a cost effective, secure and fully managed network service that allows organisations to connect your geographically dispersed sites, whether those be separate offices or home-based personnel. IPVPN provides the security of a regular VPN, in that only authorised users can access the corporate network from outside business premises, but also delivers the superior performance of IP to better support newer, more demanding yet critical applications. Moreover, as the service carries converged voice, data and video traffic over the same network, just a single infrastructure need be monitored and administered.

Compared to using multiple network access services or older technology, such as Leased Lines, IPVPN means that the organisation can improve efficiency and reduce costs, whereas Leased Lines become progressively more expensive as the number of sites and the distance between them increases. In comparison, IPVPNs enable any connected site to transmit traffic to any other site on the corporate network. So IPVPNs are typically a better alternative for organisations with an increasingly distributed workforce, as there is no need to keep adding bespoke connections when other sites or individuals are brought into the communications environment. IPVPNs also effectively extend the company network to roving workers and home-based personnel, who traditionally could run up large call charges when dialling in to access corporate resources.

Ethernet

Ethernet is a communication standard that makes next-generation networks capable of handling large amounts of data, voice and internet traffic at extremely high speeds. As it is also the standard most commonly used for the office networks - Local Area Networks, or LANs - in workplaces across the country, organisations that use Ethernet services to connect their offices and remote workers can effectively make the vast areas of the UK their own private office network. This means that the same high-speed services are available consistently regardless of location. Although it is unlikely that home workers would have such high-speed connections to their home office, ntl:Telewest Business can integrate an Ethernet network for office sites with broadband to the homes. This would give home workers the flexibility of high speed connectivity whether at home or within the office and at an aggressive budget.

On an urban or regional level, Metro Ethernet VPN offers all the functionality that organisations have come to expect from a LAN but spread over entire towns, cities or other metropolitan regions. The result is radically simplified network management and much more bandwidth than you'd get from traditional services based on Leased Lines or older Frame Relay solutions. Besides high quality, high bandwidth connectivity, Ethernet enables organisations to be far more effective at transferring their most important data between sites, and centralising data and archiving, so the geographic distribution of the workforce is not an issue. The consistency and resilience of Ethernet also enables voice, data and video services to be used between multiple sites with confidence, rather than varying services being available at different sites.

The ntl:Telewest Business network has the largest Ethernet presence in the UK and customers have experienced significant reductions in both bandwidth and network management costs, as well as benefiting from simplified network topologies and much more flexibility in managing IT across multiple sites. In fact, Ethernet-based bandwidth can be cheaper by up to a factor of 10 than traditional, older wide area network services.

National Ethernet services take this technology a stage further by being able to connect disparate sites across the UK. Delivering higher bandwidths into remote sites can facilitate more collaborative working techniques, reduce the need for travel and increase productivity. Whether you need a national point-to-point or point-to-multipoint service, the flexibility and relative simplicity of Ethernet makes the latest communications technologies much easier to deploy at head office, in the field and at home.

Managed Internet Access

Internet connectivity has become the lifeblood of the modern organisation, whether it be a business large or small, a government department or a local authority. ntl:Telewest Business offers high speed Managed Internet Access services up to 1 Gigabit-per-second (Gbps) that assure dedicated and reliable high speed Leased Line connectivity to the internet for critical systems and applications. A fully managed service that eliminates the need for customers to have to administer service changes themselves and is constantly monitored to assure performance, Managed Internet Access utilises the £13 billion state-of-the-art ntl:Telewest Business nation-wide network.

The network has been upgraded to support the very latest high-speed communications services, with 300 link points (Points of Presence) across the UK. It also offers transatlantic and European connectivity, and world class peering agreements to support international business needs.

Dependable Systems: Access Resiliency

LAN Solutions

There was a time when telephone systems and computer networks were two different worlds, with different technologies, mindsets and suppliers. Today, they are merging into a single, vital traffic stream running on the same LAN to support converged data, voice and video applications.

This means the quality and architecture of LANs is now critical to operations. Equally, wired and wireless networks must be optimally designed, built and interoperable with current and future technology requirements. This calls for more sophisticated LAN design expertise, so that the infrastructure is essentially architected rather than merely built.

ntl:Telewest Business offers comprehensive services for the design, build and ongoing maintenance of LANs. For home workers, this is important as the resilience of the office LAN is as key as their own communications links at home for completing tasks and collaborating with colleagues.

Security at LAN access points is a key design and maintenance consideration. With proper guidance, customers can ensure that security concerns are addressed everywhere in the network. Critical information can be protected while continuing to allow mobile and home workers to connect. Network security must not be a question of fitting locks and bolts, but of an entire security system, so that the protection is integrated into the fabric of the network infrastructure.

7. Conclusion

Home working is a growing practice in the UK today as working patterns become ever more flexible. The economy and competitive business markets are driving this, but new technology is enabling it.

Many organisations may still not be sure about the benefits of home working, and for some it may always be largely impractical. But one thing is for certain – home working is rapidly increasing in this country and here to stay.

In many cases, the cultural barriers to facilitating home working are now larger than the technical infrastructure barriers, as the technology is proven, robust and improving all the time.

Next-generation networks, and in particular the ntl:Telewest Business network, offer the means to deploy converged services, resilience, operational flexibility and ease of use across the entire workforce, regardless of where individuals are working from. That makes home working realistic for many more organisations and their employees, creating the fabric for a happier, healthier and more productive workforce.

For more information about ntl:Telewest Business and how it can help you to achieve home working goals, please see: www.ntltelewestbusiness.co.uk or call 0800 052 0845.