



heart of the south west
Growth Hub



BUSINESS GUIDE

How to Boost Your Productivity

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Improving your staff's productivity can give your business a competitive edge at little or no extra cost. But what are the best ways to attain this goal in practice? Here are some ideas you can start to implement immediately.

Top Tips

1. Create virtual teams

Ubiquitous fast broadband links - not to mention the increasing number of mobile devices like smartphones and tablets that people carry with them everywhere - mean you'll never have to wait days to get together a team meeting again. Technologies such as online chat and videoconferencing allow you to quickly pull together virtual teams, which could include people at multiple locations or even different countries, and suppliers, customers or outside consultants as well as your own staff. Even for video, the equipment needed to get started is minimal; many will have it already. And if seeing each other's faces in real time isn't so important, collaborative software (including free wikis) is a great alternative to copying everyone in on endless emails.

2. Keep up-to-date with file synchronisation

Attaching documents to emails was a welcome replacement for the dull task of constant photocopying to ensure that every team member had the latest version. But it's still all too easy for people to accidentally end up working with an older file, and the chaos that results is time-consuming to unpick. The solution lies in file synchronisation services. Their features vary, but a typical example is Dropbox, which works with a dedicated folder on each user's PC and continually updates this to ensure that the contents of this folder are exactly the same on all machines. In other words, everyone always has access to the same document versions.

3. Stay connected to your business phone number, everywhere

Voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) technology has the potential to dramatically reduce office telecoms costs with free calls. But it can also make you and your employees more easily contactable by allowing you to take your office phone number with you, wherever you go. VoIP providers can issue numbers with the full range of dialing codes, including geographic codes, so nobody even needs to know you're on the other side of the country.

4. Grow (or shrink) with cloud computing

Like VoIP, cloud computing isn't just about cutting costs. In fact, one of its biggest attractions is the capability it gives you to increase your IT resources - such as server power, storage space, or network bandwidth - literally at the touch of a button. You're only charged for what you use, and if your requirements decrease again, you can just as easily cut back on consumption. Productivity increases especially on new or one-off projects, because you can instantly provide all the IT resource that's needed without going through procurement and installation processes. Plus, employing the cloud



frees your IT team from many routine tasks, so they can add more value to the business in creative ways.

5. Consider the opportunities offered by flexible working

Flexibility over the location your employees work in, and the hours they do it, is a well-established productivity booster. Team members are happier and less time is wasted on commuting in the rush hour. Remote working isn't new - some professionals have been working on the road for years - but the increasing speed and quality of relatively low-cost broadband makes it a real possibility for more and more people, as the technology now allows them to be just as plugged-in to the office network from home as they would be from your premises.

6. Work anywhere with online office software

Everyday tasks such as editing a document, sending an email, or filling in a spreadsheet can take advantage of cloud technology by using online office suites such as Zoho, Google Apps, or Microsoft Office 365. Either free or subscription-based, they allow users to log on via a broadband connection and then work with fully-featured office software. Because it all happens online - nothing needs to be installed or stored on the individual's PC - users can easily switch from one computer to another (office to laptop to home, say) without experiencing any difference in the working environment.

7. Exploit the potential benefits of BYOD

Whilst the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) trend raises obvious questions such as security and confidentiality, a proactive approach to managing BYOD (much wiser than trying to ban it) can turn employees' personal devices into positive productivity aids for your business. The issues raised are usually more managerial than purely technical; they include ensuring security measures are in place and rules are observed, drawing a clear line between personal and business use, establishing what level of technical support the company will offer, and deciding what (if any) cost subsidy you'll pay to employees.

8. Streamline business processes

A doctor can rarely cure you unless they can diagnose your illness - and it's tough to improve your business practices without understanding what really happens within your organisation. Business process mapping and business process modelling are among the techniques that help you to define exactly what each part of your business ought to be doing, how they should be doing it, and how that can be measured. Once you have analysed your organisation in detail, it should be easy to identify where improvements to productivity can be made. Technology tools such as workflow management systems can then help you to ensure that the best approach is followed consistently, for example by ensuring that different departments are automatically copied in on important documents at the point they need to see them. That way, nothing's missed.

9. Invest in connectivity

An Internet connection is rapidly becoming like electricity - we can hardly function without it, and we expect to find it everywhere. So don't see connectivity as an overhead, consider it a vital enabler of productivity. That means not just investing in the most powerful broadband links you can for your office (and always over-estimate your needs - they'll only grow), but also making high-quality Wi-Fi available throughout the premises. If individual team members need to work on the move or from home, it pays to provide them with the best available mobile and home Internet plans, too. Time



spent waiting for a slow or unreliable Internet connection, or troubleshooting a stubborn router, is time wasted that could have been spent on productive work.

Summary

Today's fast, always-on Internet connections offer you a plethora of opportunities for improving productivity. Many of them are about enabling teams to function together more effectively, especially when they're not together. Others involve improving access to essential work and communications tools.

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The Heart of the South West Growth Hub Service



The Heart of the South West Growth Hub provides the key access point for business support in the Heart of the South West LEP area; Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay. We deliver independent diagnosis and referrals to existing business support services.

The Growth Hub service is the first point of contact for both new and established businesses seeking business support; the Growth Hub team is on hand to answer questions or make referrals to experts in specialist areas such as funding opportunities, tax advice, exporting or innovation.

The Growth Hub provides access to all local and national business support services and is offered completely free at point of access for all businesses seeking advice. The Growth Hub can help any business sector and any business size.

The Growth Hub is the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership's main mechanism of engaging with businesses across the area.

Service Components



Online Business Advisers – our experienced team will talk through your business goals with you and put you in touch with the best support to help you achieve them

Outreach Events – we will be running events and workshops across the Heart of the South West LEP area where you can speak to our Online Business Advisers

Website – our web portal will provide access to information about all the business support currently available in your local area as well as links to national programs. You will also find full listings of local business support events.

Information Provision – our monthly e-newsletters provide updates on support services available to businesses such as advice, grants, funding, events and workshops and key business topics such as sales, marketing or public procurement opportunities.

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