



# The Virtual Employee

Publication

9.17.12

## **Should your employees telecommute? Assessing the risks.**

Technological advances and innovations bring advantages and efficiencies. But, sooner or later, most changes bring potential disadvantages as well. In the end, we can't resist technological change: the trick is to leverage the advantages against the disadvantages and be prepared to address the downside.

Nowhere is this more true than the workplace, wherever it might be. More frequently, employers are using telecommuting as a means of increasing productivity and efficiency. In 2009, 34 million workers in the United States telecommuted at least part of the week, and estimates are that by 2016, 63 million workers (43% of the work force) will telecommute.

An employee's at-home "virtual office" might consist of a cell phone and a laptop computer. These relatively inexpensive and portable items permit an employee to work just about anywhere there is a wireless network or cell coverage. In addition, it's important to note that with these technologies, even employees who report to a brick and mortar office each day will be capable of informally "telecommuting" at all times of the night and day, for example, by answering emails over the weekend.

The advantages have been well established: increased employee productivity; increased job satisfaction; reduced absenteeism; lower employee turnover; reductions in fixed expenses, such as energy costs, office rental, and parking; improved customer service; improved employee morale; and reduced employee stress and improved health.

However, with these advantages come potential pitfalls. Telecommuting raises unique legal issues that employers need to address with established policies and procedures before they become a liability.

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This article appeared in the September 17, 2012 issue of *Mainebiz*.