

Tips when working from home

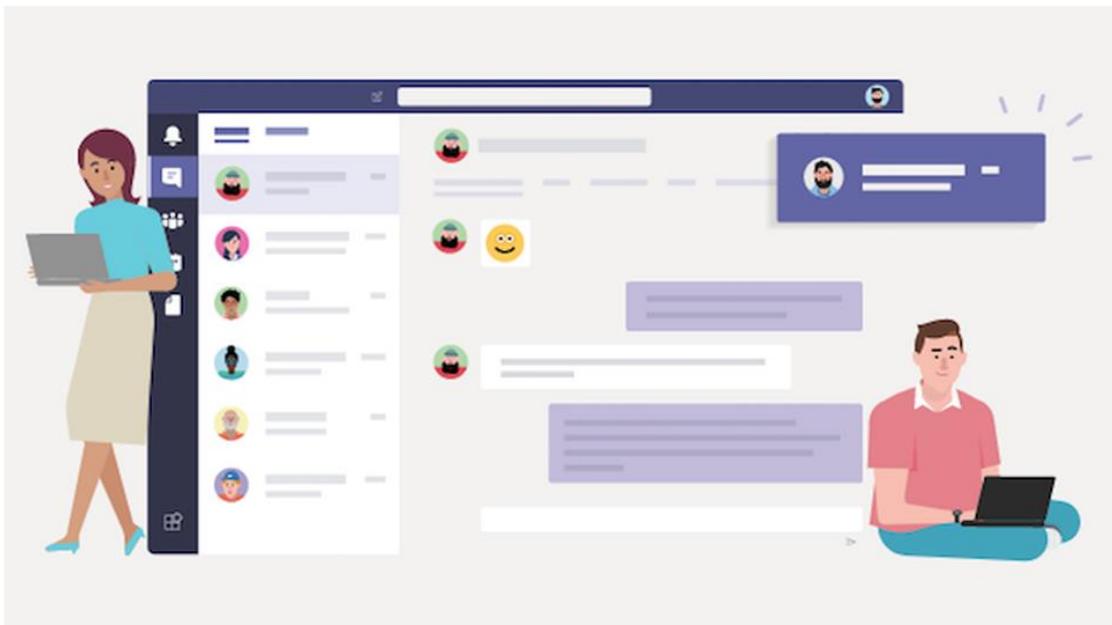
Welcome the future of work

For many of us, having structure keeps us sane. Structure such as waking up in the morning and getting ready before grabbing a coffee and heading into the office; as opposed to rolling out of bed just to head to the living room to start work. Some people may be used to working from home, over time creating a personal routine that works for them, or perhaps working from a mix of both the office and home. With technology and communication platforms becoming more and more accessible, working from home within the past few years has become a much more viable option for many. However, for some people (especially since the rise of COVID-19), this has become the sudden new norm, and if this is the case for you then stay tuned as we have some tips and tricks ahead that will help you in various ways to embrace the positives working from home can offer.

There has been a trend towards more flexible working for years, with both methods of working - wfh (work from home) or wfa (work from anywhere) seeing an increase. The recent pandemic hasn't introduced something new; but instead has accelerated this change, forcing businesses who had been reluctant to allow remote and flexible working to at least accept, if not embrace the modern office approach to work. Many businesses are even now considering staying partly or entirely this way even when working life returns to normal.

Work as a team with Teams

One platform that has really helped workplaces function as normal when geographically dispersed is Microsoft Teams. With so many versatile features meaning you can not only message people and stay in the loop at work, but you can also video and voice call with each other, individually or in groups. If enabled Teams can even replace your phone system-allowing hunt groups, transferring calls and seeing who's available and who's busy. Noticeably FreshStance and our customers using Teams (and the other solutions described here) have required far less IT assistance than those without.



Video calling is vital for building relationships, likely more than you think. As humans, we need more than just voice to build a connection, and 2020 has made it extremely hard to have the kind of human one on one time we all need. This is where video chat and calling comes into play, as we can talk to each other and interact in a more human way than just messaging. When video calling, turn on the camera when possible as this will give you a sense of

connection while talking as opposed to feeling dissociated from the world around you. It also makes it easier to understand one another, seeing as the majority of the ways in which humans interact is through movement and expression, not just talking.

This is all especially important when working with someone new. Once relationships and ways of working and communicating have been established, communicating through voice or email work well - but during the initial 'getting to know you' phase being able to see the person you're talking to and picking up non-verbal communication can be a huge help.

At the same time when those relationships are established employees shouldn't be pressured into keeping camera's on during entire meetings or necessarily in a meeting at all. This can make employee self-conscious, feel pressured and concerned they're being judged about where they're calling from. Far better to have them engaged, happy and productive on a call rather than stressed.

Simplify emailing

Outlook, another Microsoft 365 app, can also help you in keeping up with more vital emails from colleagues by prioritising them. You can do this simply by filtering them into high priority emails in order to keep track of who to reply to and what actions to take first before others.

You can also set up message rules to move unimportant emails to sub folders so you can look at them at an appropriate time and avoid being distracted the rest of the time.

Ask yourself this; how long does it generally take people to respond to your emails? If the answer is normally more than half an hour, then that's hopefully enough proof for you to see that not responding to every email as it comes in does not mean that you're bad at replying. Scheduling certain times throughout the day to deal with emails, perhaps an hour in the morning and after lunch plus some time at the end of the day, will reduce interruptions and help you be more productive.

Healthy body = healthy mind

Exercise. You've probably heard how vital exercise is a hundred times over, but it is great for not only your body, but your mind too; releasing endorphins and boosting your confidence.

It also helps you to work better, ever heard of the saying: a healthy body is a healthy mind? Well, this couldn't be truer than when working from home. As most of us aren't going to in-person meetings now, it can be hard to break up your day and keep concentration over long periods of time, and exercising can help this by relieving stress and tension, causing a boost in productivity.

The same goes for hydration and healthy eating; with studies from both the University of East London and the University of Westminster indicating that even the sensation of thirst can have an impact on how efficient and productive someone is in a task. Being even slightly dehydrated can also lead to low mood and difficulty concentrating, as well as having a negative impact on memory - proving why it's so important to take care of your body at the moment.

Taking a break from looking at screens from time to time is important too. Focusing on things at different distances from you will stretch the muscles in your eyes, helping protect your eyesight and make you feel less tired.

Scrolling, scrolling, and more scrolling

Our phones have seen our faces a lot this year: with us mindlessly scrolling through social media to pass the time, as well as communicating with loved ones. As positive as communication is, constantly checking our phones can take a mental toll on us, providing us with an instant sense of gratification and leading our brain's to process information at an extremely fast pace.



Sometimes we need a break from this constant stream of information, our brains need to rest from screen time (that includes working for 8 hours a day using a PC/ laptop). Set aside a couple of hours each evening to do something that doesn't involve a screen. Interact with people in your household and do something together, or take some time alone to do what you enjoy, as this will leave you feeling relaxed and ultimately more productive throughout the week, as it gives your brain a chance to wind down.

Improving your workspace.

When working from home, attempting to set up your office in bed more often than not only ends in bad posture and the urge to have a nap. Try to have a separate room or space set up for working from home and invest in a chair that imitates the same support as one that's designed for an office space. This will provide you with great back support and is likely comfortable to sit in, overall making your day more positive and less disrupted.

On the subject of disruption, having a set space for working in also allows for a clearer headspace to work in with less interruptions from the people you live with and pets. Did you know that if you're working intently and are interrupted it generally takes about 20 minutes to get back to the level of productivity you had before the interruption? You can change this by working in a separate designated room and shutting the door when you're working, meaning it's far less likely you'll be interrupted by anyone.

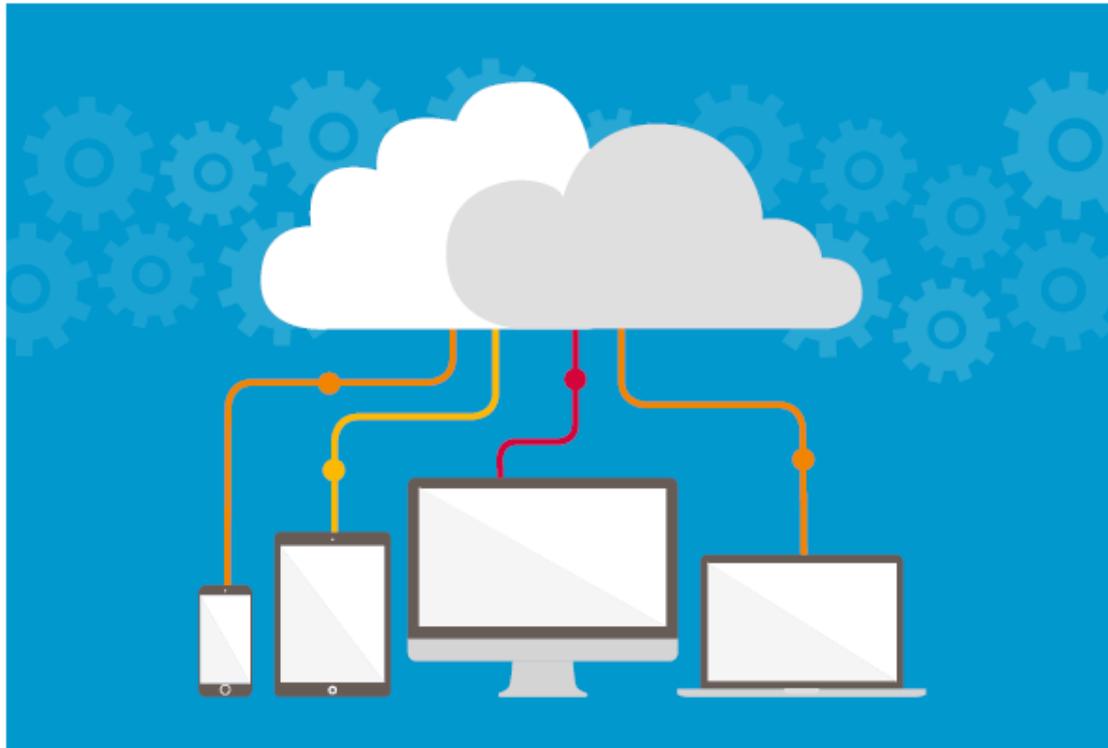
Finally, organisation is key. When working from home, clutter is the enemy, leading to a chaotic state of mind when working, mirroring your surroundings. Tidying up and decluttering applies to not only your working space physically, but very importantly your digital space too!

With most of us working on our laptops and PCs 9 to 5, Monday to Friday; it's inevitable that we need our digital spaces to be clean and organised, otherwise it's hard to get anything done due to a sense of feeling overwhelmed. Procrastination and a general lack in productivity can then occur because of this absence of structure.

Storing, sharing and working together

One easy way in which you can organise your files and data is through storage options such as a hard drive or the cloud. Both being reliable options, we at FreshStance would generally recommend that you store your data in two locations or platforms in case one fails, that may be two cloud solutions or locally on the cloud. This is even more important if you have compliance requirements to retain data such as those applied to our private medical and financial clients.

SharePoint and OneDrive allow you to store data online and sync it locally to work offline (if you're on a train or plane for example – if you remember those!). It also allows more than one person to work on a document or spreadsheet at the same time, so the sales team can write the pretty intro while the tech guys sort out the specs and finance can figure out the numbers – all at the same time, making sure you get the proposal that's going to grow your business despite the lockdown out in super quick time. We provide backup solutions for Office 365 too.



Welcome to the future

Instead of fighting the fact that working from home is the new norm, most likely with one or two days a week in the office: it's much less stressful to embrace it with open arms and customise your working practices and environment to make it easy on yourself and your team.

Working from home (or anywhere else you like) gives you back the time you used to waste on your commute, most likely taking up an hour, two hours, or even more every day. Treat yourself with the money you're saving by not buying expensive rail season tickets, petrol or diesel and on the additional wear and tear the commute subjected you too – and on the expensive sandwiches and coffee you used to buy. Why not get a fancy coffee machine at home with the money you're saving?

For business owners reducing the size of the office and moving to hot desks for when people do come in can allow downsizing and reducing costs to the business too. Sweating in the heat of the underground, freezing in the crisp early mornings waiting for a train or bus, and getting stuck in traffic are now becoming distant memories. And we say good riddance to them! Let's enjoy that extra time with our families and hobbies, and treat ourselves with the savings.

Let's keep learning to adapt and change together, making everyone's lives simpler for the better. And if FreshStance might be able to help – please get in touch. We'd be delighted to talk to you (video optional!).