

Connect!

A Guide to a New Way of Working
from GigaOM's Web Worker Daily™



SPECIAL BONUS CHAPTER!

Work from Home:
A No-Nonsense Guide to Home-based Work



*Tips, Resources, and Inspiration
for the Web Worker in Us All*



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Work from Home

A No-Nonsense Guide to Home-based Work

Do you dream of working from home? Flexibly blending the professional with the personal? Working hours that suit you instead of following some old-fashioned nine-to-five schedule? All in an environment that you arrange so it suits your needs and temperament? I want to help you make that dream happen.

The web can allow great freedom in how you work, whether you're in an office, a wifi café or at home. In our book *Connect! A Guide to a New Way of Working*, [Web Worker Daily](http://webworkerdaily.com/) (<http://webworkerdaily.com/>) editor Judi Sohn and I offer practical tips and advice along with what I hope is a big dose of inspiration for succeeding with web work—no matter what setting you choose.

If you want to do your web work from home, however, you have a big project ahead of you. While home-based work is effective and productive, succeeding at it can be a challenge. Some employers are skeptical or downright opposed to it. Some work-at-home positions are little more than scams. And some people find it's just not the nirvana they imagined. To help you overcome those obstacles, I've written this bonus chapter.

In it you'll find:

- **Choosing home-based work.** When you choose to create a home-based working situation, you are affirming your values: independence, discipline, the importance of your personal life, and more. It's not a default choice for most employees, employers, or entrepreneurs, and that makes it all the more meaningful.

- **At least the slippers are comfortable.** From the reality of the pay to the difficulty of finding home-based work to the time and effort you'll have to put into it to make it succeed, eleven uncomfortable truths about home-based work.
- **Planting the seeds of home-based work.** How to launch your campaign for home-based work using the tactics that suit your current situation and your eventual goal.
- **Make it work.** To succeed at home-based work, you'll need more communication, more discipline, more boundaries, and more connectedness than ever before.

Choosing home-based work

The self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.

—John Dewey

Home-based work can be more satisfying and productive than office work, and it allows a more fluid work-life blend than a nine-to-five cubicle gig might. Yet the number of people working from home is small, for many reasons:

- Employers, for the most part, prefer on-site workers.
- Paper-based work processes may make remote work impossible, especially if paper documents need to stay in the office for security reasons.
- Working from home can make workers feel isolated or unproductive, so many prefer to work in an office.
- Telecommuting may be looked at as a perk or benefit for workers and a sacrifice for employers rather than a win for both.
- Broadband and the services that make remote work feasible and effective have only recently become widely available.

If you decide to work from home you'll be joining a small subset of the U.S. working population—around 5%. You'll be making a choice that's neither

easy nor popular. You'll most likely have to find your own path, but you'll be rewarded in many ways, not least by having the chance to express your values through your work life.

In this section, you'll learn about the context of home-based work, the reasons people choose it, and what your basic options are for home-based work arrangements.

Home-based work in the U.S.A.

As of May 2004, about 3.3 million people had arranged part- or full-time telecommuting situations with their employer, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (see <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/homey.nr0.htm> for details). Another 4.7 million ran home-based businesses. This represented a bit more than 5% of the total nonagricultural working population at the time. As the web has made working from home even easier, it's likely that the number of people currently working from home is even greater, but they still represent just a small piece of the labor population pie.

The vast majority of jobs that could be done from home—those that just require a desk and chair, a computer, a phone, and an Internet connection—are done in offices established by employers. And most employers won't even consider hiring a new employee that would work from home; telecommuting arrangements are often reserved only for those who have already proven themselves as on-site employees.

To get a better idea of employers' lack of commitment to home-based work, we need look no further than AT&T, a company that used to be known for its telework programs. In November of 2007, AT&T began calling some workers—up to 12,000 of them, according to some reports—back from their home offices. Some in the know speculated that this was because certain managers didn't believe in remote work. Unfortunately, such an attitude is all too common in today's managerial ranks.

This despite evidence that home-based workers are more loyal, more productive, and more satisfied than those working in offices. Home-based work is often a win-win for employees and their employers. A recent meta-analysis—a study that examined and combined the results of many prior studies—found that telecommuting showed positive effects on perceived autonomy, work-family balance, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intent and stress. See <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071119182930.htm> to read about the study.

Plus, home-based work can save employers money even as they get a more productive and satisfied workforce. The more home-based workers a company uses, the less office space it needs to lease and maintain. And reduced absenteeism decreases costs too.

Why choose home-based work?

The reasons you might choose home-based work are many:

- You are tired of commuting.
- You need more flexibility in your daily life.
- You want to live in a place where there are few jobs in your field.
- You work more productively in your own home office.
- You want to more flexibly mix your work and personal life.
- You want to work according to your own hours, not someone else's.

No matter what your reasons, you can almost certainly find a home-based work situation that will suit you. But you can't make it work without sacrifice and hard work—harder work, at least in the beginning, than if you stayed in the cubicle. Since the default way of working, especially for employees, is to work on site at an employer's office, you will probably have to make certain tradeoffs in order to achieve your goal of working from home.

But in so doing you affirm what's important to you. The work-at-home choice is for those willing to take on the difficult and uncertain project of making it succeed. Your payoff will not only be in the income you earn and the flexibility you gain, but also in the example you set as someone willing to overcome obstacles in order to make a better work life blend.

Telecommuting, freelancing, or entrepreneurship?

If you think you might like to work from home, you'll need to explore your options. Do you want to stick with your current employer or business? Do you want to freelance? Do you want to start a home-based business? Or would you like to find a new job with benefits, including the benefit of working from home part- or full-time?

If you are happy with your job, the natural first approach will be to work with your current employer to see if they will support a part- or full-time telecommuting arrangement. If you are unhappy with your job, but want the

health insurance and other benefits that come with employment, you'll want to look for a job that provides for telecommuting now or in the future.

But you may be looking for a more independent approach. With freelancing, you combine aspects of employment and entrepreneurship. You sell your labor on a contract basis, and you are free to work for one or more than one employer at a time. You will probably charge by the hour.

Maybe you dream of having your own business—marketing and selling services or products instead of your labor. You might even imagine hiring employees.

Let's take a look at the three main modes of home-based work and consider the pros and cons of each. Then you can begin to define which one might work for you.

Telecommuting

When you work at home as a W-2 employee of a business, you are considered a telecommuter. Telecommuting is ideal for those who need the health insurance, paid vacation, and other benefits that employment often provides. In addition to giving you a stable income and a degree of security that you don't get with freelancing or entrepreneurship, your employer often provides the hardware and software you need for remote working, along with the technical support needed to keep it all functioning.

Telecommuters, however, may find that because many of their colleagues work on site, they are comparatively less visible and so may be passed over for promotion opportunities. Many companies have certain expectations about what makes an ideal employee, and the home-based telecommuter doesn't always match those expectations. Employees who choose telecommuting may therefore find their careers somewhat stagnant relative to what they enjoyed as on-site employees. That doesn't have to happen, but you should be aware of the possibility when you choose home-based employment.

Freelancing

Freelancing can look very similar to traditional employment or it can be more entrepreneurial in nature, depending on how many clients and projects you take on, how you market your services, and how you brand your business (if you do that at all).

As a freelancer, you get the excitement of working on different projects for different companies, but you have to drum up those opportunities then

handle or outsource the related bookkeeping and invoicing. And although you usually get to set your own schedule, you may find yourself working extremely long hours in order to make more money and ensure your financial security.

Compared with salaried employment, freelancing by the hour can be a grind. If you're not working, you're not making money, whereas employees can usually find time to slack off or handle personal matters while on the clock.

But you may make better money as a freelancer, even after accounting for the additional social security contributions you must make, the equipment and insurance you must buy, and the vacation time for which you don't get paid. If you have expertise and skills that are in demand, you might be able to charge an hourly rate much higher than you might command as an employee.

Entrepreneurship

Freelancing is a kind of entrepreneurship, but I treat it separately because it's more akin to employment than many small business endeavors you might choose. If you decide to sell services or products rather than directly contracting out your labor, you've entered a whole different world. You may hire employees. You may advertise your services. You may take out a business loan or engage an angel investment in order to expand.

The potential plusses and minuses of entrepreneurship are significantly higher than other home-based endeavors: your payoff could be very large, but so could your losses.

Just as with freelancing, you'll need to arrange for your own health insurance (and possibly that of employees) and make enough money to cover sick and vacation leave as well as any other benefits that would normally be provided by an employer. You purchase and manage your own equipment, but you can deduct that from your business income.

But while freelancers can start earning income immediately, entrepreneurs usually must invest resources up front to structure the business, produce any goods that will be sold, market those goods (or services, if applicable) and hire labor as necessary. Entrepreneurs need money in the bank, both for these startup expenses and to live on.

If you don't know which one is right

That's okay! You don't need to know up front exactly how your work-from-home situation will look. In fact, it may be impossible to figure that out without doing some exploration and experimentation. Later in this chapter, you'll

learn some tactics you can use to discover what kind of home-based work is right for you.

At least the slippers are comfortable

I'm not crazy about reality, but it's still the only place to get a decent meal.

—Groucho Marx

Given that home-based workers are more productive and satisfied while often costing employers less money, you'd think we'd all be going home, changing from street shoes to slippers, and getting to work. But no. The vast majority of jobs that could be done remotely aren't, and employers aren't very enthusiastic overall about the possibilities.

If you want to work from home, you're going to face some uncomfortable truths about it—how hard it is to find a position, how difficult it is to succeed once you do, and more. Before we get to the nitty-gritty of how to go about finding and succeeding at home-based work, we need to talk about how hard it is. Maybe I'm being a bit too pessimistic here, but I'd much rather set your expectations low than lead you down some daffodil-lined path more dream than reality.

Job market reality

You can't just do what you love and count on the money—and home-based work arrangement—to follow. You're constrained, at least partly, by what sorts of jobs are available and feasible for home-based work.

Not all jobs are suited to home-based work

Some jobs are impossible to do from a location other than where the actual business is taking place—clinical health care, retail sales in a brick-and-mortar store, and teaching ballet, for example. If the career you're in just doesn't support remote work (you're an elementary school teacher or an office manager, for example) you're going to have to either give up your dream of home-based work or make some changes to what work you're qualified and willing to do. For example, an elementary school teacher could become an online

tutor. An office manager could become a virtual assistant, someone who handles clerical work remotely.

Check Table 1 for some ideas of home-based work possibilities in various fields to limber up your thinking about what can be done at home.

Table 1: Remote work opportunities in various fields

Field	Home-based work possibilities
Politics	Policy analysis, blogging, fundraising, campaign consulting
Nursing	Case management, phone triage, online health advice
Writing	Freelance writing, professional blogging, technical writing
Web design and development	Freelance design and development, work for IT department at remote-friendly company
Customer support	Outsourced, home-based customer support by telephone or online
Education	Online professor or tutor, online workshop coordinator
Legal	Home-based practice, online legal advice

You might have to upgrade your skills

If working from home is important to you but your current skills won't let you pursue it, consider whether you need to invest in learning skills that are in demand for remote work. That could be anything from computer programming to web design to copywriting to something like nursing or patent law. All of these skills are in such high demand that there's home-based work available in those fields.

Does that mean you have to go back to school? Not necessarily. Many fields suitable for home-based work don't require a specific degree, but rather specific skills. You can get these skills in a number of ways. Consider volunteering, taking a junior or apprentice-level job, practicing on your own and sharing what you produce for free, or taking a professional certificate course, either online or in person.

Employer reality

While the overall job market might suggest that, given your skills and experience, your options for home-based work are good, you have to deal with specific employers, not the job market as a whole. And those employers don't always make home-based work easy.

Not all employers will go for it

No matter what arguments you use to try to convince your employer that you should be able to telecommute full time, not every employer will agree to it, especially when first approached. It may take a few tries, if you can convince them at all. The majority of office work is still done in offices and the majority of management believes in the wisdom of that approach. If home-based work is very important to you and your employer won't support it, you may need to change jobs.

There are, however, some employers open to telecommuting arrangements, especially for high-performing employees with in-demand skills. IBM, Sun Microsystems and Accenture are three large companies known for supporting home-based and other remote work arrangements. Outsourcing telephone support and sales companies like Alpine Access hire home-based workers, though given how many people want to work from home, the jobs are not very highly paid and are hard to get. And Crayon is a new marketing company that wants to hire the best marketing minds, regardless of where those minds reside.

Even the federal government supports some home-based work. For example, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office encourages remote work arrangements so that they might attract the highly trained attorneys they need.

It's up to you to make it work, not your management

If you successfully convince a current or future manager to let you work from home, it's your responsibility to make that remote work arrangement succeed.

So take the steps you need to—communicate frequently, get your work done on time, and address problems before they turn into disasters. Be proactive; do your job better than everyone else to make your flexibility worth your employer's concessions. Make sure you have the hardware, software and office setup you need, even if you're not directly reimbursed for everything. At the end of this chapter, I will share some success tips for home-based work. But

the first success tip of them all is for you to take responsibility for making it work. If you aren't willing to do that, then home-based work isn't for you.

Your spouse or partner and other household members may also need to make sacrifices in order to make your home-based work successful. In return for your greater flexibility and availability, for example, they may need to allow you to work more on nights and weekends so that you can show the high performance your employer will expect in exchange for allowing you to work from home.

Economic reality

The economic facts of home-based work may not be easy to accept. Before you commit to it, be aware of how it might change your financial situation.

You might not make as much money

Like it or not, choosing the freedom of home-based working often means sacrificing some income. If you telecommute, your employer may not give you the raises you want, thinking that you're less committed to the organization than on-site employees. If you freelance, you might make less money overall than you could as an on-site employee, especially after paying for health insurance and vacation time on your own. If you start your own business, you might achieve personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement but without the steady flow of a salary.

It's not totally fair, but it's what you confront when making so many of life's decisions: you have to make tradeoffs. You may not be able to get everything you want, at least not at first.

But home-based work does have some financial advantages. You don't have to spend as much money on gas and car maintenance. You may be able to buy more casual, less expensive clothes. You may not have to spend as much on child care. Your health may improve if you create a working environment at home that suits you better and decreases stress. You may not go out for lunch as often.

And anyway, factors other than money likely have a greater impact on your well-being. It's more important to stay socially connected and healthy than to work long hours for high pay. You can read more about the relationship between wealth and well-being in *Connect! A Guide to a New Way of Working*.

You might face global competition

If you find work that can be done remotely that you're suited for in terms of skills and temperament you may be competing with English speakers around the world for that work. If you can do it remotely from your home office, other people can probably do it from foreign countries. You may have an edge because you can do a part-time telecommute, part-time on-site job, or because you have the cultural know-how and language skills that a particular job requires. On the other hand, you may cost too much.

Personality reality

Are you suited to home-based work? Not everyone is.

It's not for slackers

Working from home without the eye pressure of other people means you need to motivate yourself mainly from within. If you can only get work done when other people are watching you, home-based work might not suit you. Employers who want their workers where they can see them are not irrational—many people despite all good intentions just can't get work done in the absence of external motivation to do so.

If you don't know whether you'd have the discipline to make home-based work successful, you might want to arrange for some trial home-based work before committing irrevocably to it. Don't quit your cubicle job to freelance from home if you haven't already tried working from home. But give it a good chance; it takes time to figure out how to make it work.

Later in the chapter, I have some suggestions for how to keep yourself motivated and productive when working from home. As you gain experience and experiment with different ways of getting tasks done, you'll come up with your own productivity tactics too.

You might feel isolated

Some people find home-based work lonely. If you like the noise and camaraderie of an office environment, you might find a home office too quiet.

If you want to get out of the cubicle but working out of your home isn't right for you, you can always lease an office or look into co-working (cooperative work arrangements for those who don't have an employer's office to go to). You can read more about choosing the right work setting for you in *Connect!*

There are ways, of course, to feel socially connected while working from home. I offer some tips for that later in this chapter as well.

It blurs work-life boundaries

Some people love the work-life blend that home-based work allows. Others want to be able to leave their jobs at the office and only focus on their friends and family. Home-based workers need to figure out how to separate work from home. When you work in an office according to standard hours it's easy to see the line between work and personal life, although your accessibility by email and mobile phone blurs that line. When you work at home, it's like there's no line at all.

There are ways of dealing with the work-life blur of home-based work. I cover some of them in the next section. And just like with home-based productivity, you will, over time, come up with your own ways of compartmentalizing work so it doesn't bleed into your personal life.

Bottom-line reality

Is it really possible to find a good home-based work opportunity? Yes it is, but it's not easy.

It takes time and effort to find home-based work

Because home-based work is not the norm in our workforce, you're going to have to work hard to create a successful situation for yourself. You may have to convince your current management, find a new job (and possibly prove yourself on site first), or start a side business while you're still working for your current employer.

The benefits of home-based work are numerous, so it can definitely be worth your time and effort. But that time and effort may be more extensive than you initially thought. It could take you months or even years, especially if you need to upgrade your skills in order to equip yourself with what the market for home-based work demands.

There's no guaranteed way to get it

You may read about ways to convince your management to let you telecommute, but if they come across as definitive or concrete, don't be fooled. Just because someone can list ten steps for you to follow to create a remote working arrangement doesn't mean those steps will actually work in your particular situation.

Recognize that in order to make a home-based working situation successful for yourself, you might have to do anything from finding a new job to starting your own business to getting additional education. For now, the choice to work from home is anything but easy or straightforward. But that makes it all the more sweet when you do succeed in finding the situation that's right for you.

Many work-at-home offers and schemes are scams

Unfortunately, unscrupulous people often try to take advantage of those looking to earn income from their homes. Be cautious of anything that sounds too good to be true, that arrives via email, or that requires you to recruit others in order to make money.

The Scambusters web site lists the top ten work-from-home scams at <http://www.scambusters.org/work-at-home.html>, including medical billing, craft assembly, and envelope stuffing. Before you sign up for anything, review that list and do a search online to see if what you're contemplating is a scam or for real. Better yet, use the tactics I outline later—like networking online, raising your professional profile, and researching actual home-based work opportunities—to find an honest home-based work situation.

Do you still want to do it?

If, after all these uncomfortable truths about the reality of home-based work you still want to go for it, then get ready to go after your goal. I have some tactics for you in the next section.

Planting the seeds of home-based work

Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds you plant.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

So now you know: It's not easy to get a good home-based work situation. It's unfortunately not well-supported by employers. There are many people competing for a few home-based jobs. Work-from-home scams abound. And freelancing or entrepreneurship requires you take on some financial risk in addition to all that hard work.

But you still want to do it. So get started on your quest for home-based work by choosing the tactics that suit your particular situation. Know that you may have to plant a lot of seeds, carefully cultivate them, and then hope for good weather so that eventually you'll harvest your own home-based work.

Transitioning to telecommuting

If you are already employed and your job could feasibly be done from home, your first strategy will likely be to convince your employer to allow you to telecommute on a part- or full-time basis.

Much has been written in other places about how to convince your manager to let you telecommute, including on Web Worker Daily at <http://webworkerdaily.com/2007/11/13/so-you-wanna-work-from-home-you-can-convince-your-boss/> in which WWD writer Dian Schaffhauser spoke with Chuck Wilsker, president and CIO of the Telework Coalition at telcoa.org. You'll also find suggestions in that article on how to address all of your employer's concerns, from equipment to business continuity to security. Wilsker suggests you not use the "t word" (telecommute) and instead frame it as distributed or virtual working.

Aside from following advice such as Wilsker's, keep in mind that each situation is different, so you'll have to tailor your approach accordingly. Just meeting with your manager once may not be enough. You may need to plant seeds and hold discussions over time, letting your manager become more comfortable with the idea. You might want to start with a trial, part-time evaluation so that you and the people you work with can determine how feasible home-based work is.

Some of the tactics outlined below can also make it more likely that your manager will support your home-based work. Raising your professional profile, upgrading your skills, and learning more about distributed work opportunities can all encourage (or pressure) your manager towards supporting home-based work.

Unfortunately, some employers maintain opposition to home-based work because of the precedent it sets. You may be the perfect candidate for home-based work—your work could be easily done from home, you are a high performer who is internally disciplined, and you have the communication skills to make it succeed—but your employer may not want to let you to do it simply because then other people will want to do it, too.

In other words, don't put all your emphasis on convincing and persuading your employer directly. Other actions you take can be just as important—or more important—in moving you towards that home-based situation you want.

Starting from bare soil

If you don't already have a job that you'd like to turn into a home-based work situation, then you will be looking for a new income opportunity—whether employment or entrepreneurial—that allows you to work from home. While most advertised jobs are for on-site workers, that doesn't mean that you're out of luck or that you must first start as on-site employee and then prove yourself before you can telecommute.

But there's no step-by-step, systematic, guaranteed way of getting a home-based working situation, either, even if you are an employee already. Instead, you may want to think of your quest for home-based work as just that—a quest. Or maybe a campaign. Or maybe a garden.

However you look at it, you will use a variety of tactics to search for, find or create that home-based job you want. I think these six are most important:

- Stay aware of opportunities
- Upgrade your skills
- Start a side business
- Target industries that are open to remote work
- Raise your professional profile
- Practice professional networking

You may choose just one of these or—for more effectiveness and more fun, too—choose more than one.

A word about your attitude: Remember that the journey should be as rewarding as the destination. As you learn about home-based work possibilities, raise your professional profile, and network with people in your professional community, you will be growing and changing all the time. It should be an enriching time. Focus on the activities you're doing, not just on your goal (which itself is just another beginning point).

Stay aware of opportunities

Right now, you probably don't know all the different ways you might use your skills for home-based work. So you may want to start doing regular research

to learn what sort of opportunities exist. As you better understand the landscape of home-based work possibilities, you'll see how to put the other tactics into play.

If you're an employee, start by researching your employer's distributed work support. Is there a formal plan for allowing certain employees to telecommute? Have other employees arranged home-based work situations? What about in other divisions?

Then look into other companies in your field. Do your employer's competitors offer telecommuting to some employees? Check the Best Workplaces for Commuters web site at www.bestworkplaces.org to see what companies in your field offer formal telecommuting programs.

Use online job sites to see what kind of remote opportunities are available. Some, like Craigslist, include telecommuting among their job listing search criteria so you can view any opportunities open to telecommuters. You can view a list of employers who have in the past offered home-based work arrangements at HomeWorkersNet (www.homeworkersnet.com). You can look for home-based work opportunities at FlexJobs (www.flexjobs.com). You can follow job boards on web sites and blogs that cover your industry; for example, Web Worker Daily's parent site GigaOM runs a job board at gigaomjobs.com.

If you're considering working for yourself, research home-based businesses, too. StartupNation compiled a list of the top 100 home-based businesses for 2007 available at <http://startupnation.com/home-based-100/0/0/>. Those aren't just ideas—they are actual businesses. One might inspire you.

Follow blogs and other web sites that cover home-based work topics like finding home-based work, starting a freelance business, or working online. A few such sites are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Websites with information about home-based work

Site	Website address
The Anti 9-to-5 Guide	www.anti9to5guide.com
Chief Home Officer	www.chiefhomeofficer.com
eMoms at Home	www.emomsathome.com
Escape from Cubicle Nation	www.escapefromcubiclenation.com
Freelance Switch	www.freelanceswitch.com

Table 2: Websites with information about home-based work (*continued*)

Site	Website address
HomeWorkersNet	www.homeworkersnet.com
Startup Nation	www.startupnation.com
Telework Coalition	www.telcoa.org
Work from Home Momma	www.workfromhomemomma.com

Upgrade your skills

As you come to understand which skills will best position you to get the home-based job you want, you might think about whether you need to improve your existing skills or add new ones.

You can gain skills in a variety of ways: by taking on an unpaid internship, by enrolling in professional classes (such as those offered in a university's continuing education program), by earning a new degree in a field that allows for home-based work, or some combination of these.

This tactic may require a significant investment of time and money, but if it allows you a satisfying and lucrative home-based career over many years, it will be worth it.

Distance learning offers a great way to upgrade your skills, and it's increasingly easy to find an online learning situation that meets your needs. In addition to searching online for a program that suits you, check with your local community college; many offer online classes covering a variety of fields with inexpensive tuition rates for state residents.

Start a side business

Perhaps you think you might like to start your own business, but you're not sure if you'd like it or how much success you might see. The web makes it quite easy to start an online business with a small investment of time and money. You can experiment with an ad-supported blog, with e-commerce (selling products you make or purchase), or with creating an online community.

Of course, you don't have to create an online business. You might start a side business in some field you've always wanted to explore—interior design, PC tech support, personal organization, artisanal baking, and so forth—and market your services or products online.

As the term suggests, you don't have to give up your current work before trying a side business. In fact, it makes good sense to try out self-employment on a part-time basis before committing completely to it.

Even if your side business doesn't turn into a main source of income, the experience you gain will help you decide what the best career for you is.

If your side business is close to your day job's industry, you may have to ask your employer's permission. It's far better to be honest than found out. Be careful not to work the side business on company time or using company resources.

Target industries that are open to remote work arrangements

You may have the best luck in your quest for home-based work if you target the industries that are most open to it. These include such new economy industries as blogging (though you may not be paid very well), search engine optimization, and web design and development, as well as more old economy possibilities like telephone support, IT consulting (which may require significant travel), and freelance writing. Your research into home-based work (the first tactic above) will introduce you to other industries open to it.

You don't have to limit yourself to only those industries and employers that already support home-based work, of course. But it may make your achieving your goal a bit easier.

Raise your professional profile online

Make yourself well-known in your field online and opportunities will flow your way—some of which might allow you to work from home. How do you raise your professional profile? It depends, of course, on your field. But many professionals will find that blogging is a good first step. Participate in online forums too. If you are a photographer or web designer or in some other visual field, share your work in galleries. If you are a software developer, work on open-source projects. Make yourself known in your field and when people need help they will come to you.

If you are employed, be careful how you go about building your professional profile through blogging or other online actions. Your employer may have a blogging policy that you need to follow if you use your own name and write about the company and your experiences there.

Practice professional networking

Career planning handbooks will remind you that most jobs aren't advertised, but are found through relationships and networking. This is just as true of home-based work. Build up a professional network online (*Connect!* will tell you how to get started) and then use it to find out about job possibilities.

Your professional network isn't just useful for finding or creating a home-based job—but also for helping you succeed at it once you get it. In the next section, I cover what you need to know and do to make your work successful once you start working from home.

Work from home success tips

Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.

—Peter Drucker

Succeeding with home-based work requires more communication, more discipline, more boundaries, and more connectedness than succeeding in an office setting.

More communication

Out of sight can mean out of mind, so keep your manager or client apprised of what you're doing, without being disruptive or annoying:

- **Show your daily accomplishments using workstreaming.** With workstreaming, you provide regular updates as to what you've accomplished on a web page, in an RSS (really simple syndication) feed, in a team chat room, by email, or other channel. This gives you a record of what you've accomplished and shows your manager how much and when you're working. No face time necessary!
- **Use multiple communications channels.** Don't get stuck on just one, like email. Try others, too, so that you build richer relationships and show your availability in different ways.

- **Tune communication to management and clients' needs and preferences.** Notice how people like to communicate—some prefer instant messaging, others email, and still others the phone. Don't always default to the channel you prefer, because you could be missing out on building better relationships with the people you work with.
- **Communicate even when you think something's obvious.** It's easy to mistakenly think that the people you work with know what's going on. But with distributed teams, they likely may not. You can send for-your-information emails (or update a web page) telling your manager and/or your teammates what you're working on not because you need their input but just to keep them in the loop.

More discipline

It is definitely harder to stay motivated and productive when no one's watching. So use these techniques to make it easier:

- **Timed dashes.** Promoted by productivity gurus like Merlin Mann of 43 Folders (43folders.com) and Gina Trapani of Lifehacker (lifehacker.com), a timed dash forces you to work for a certain length of time before taking a break. Set a timer on your computer (or use the oven timer) for 10 or 15 minutes. Work for that period of time, even if you don't feel like it. At the end of the dash, take a break if you need to or, if you've created enough momentum that you can keep going, keep working.
- **Timeboxing.** Timeboxing is similar to timed dashes, but is aimed at reducing perfectionism and getting work done on deadline. Take a project and break it down into tasks small enough to estimate individually (and of less than a day in duration). Set aside the amount of time you think you need to finish the task—and do it in that time period, using a timer to keep you honest. You won't be able to worry about doing it perfectly. You'll just get it done.
- **Keep track of what you've done.** Workstreaming is not just good for letting clients, managers, and co-workers know what you're doing. It's also good for you to see what you're getting done. A sense of accomplishment will spur you on to more.

For more productivity tips, check out the Web Worker Daily web site and *Connect!*, the companion guide to the site.

More boundaries

Home-based work allows you to mix your personal life with your professional life more fluidly than ever before. It also means it's hard to ever turn work off. Try these things to keep work in its place:

- **Establish specific times when you are working and not working.** Though you may have to occasionally make exceptions, getting in the habit of only working during certain times will help keep work from seeping into every corner of your life.
- **Create work-only and no-work zones in your house.** This may not be feasible for everyone, but it can help establish geographic boundaries to your work activities.
- **Use the office door, if you have one, to indicate when it's OK to interrupt.** If you have kids, teach them that if your office door is closed they should not interrupt (making sure you have alternate arrangements for them, of course) and that if your office door is open they can come in.
- **Choose personal activities that engage you in flow.** Sometimes it's hard to stop working because work engages you and challenges you. Time off feels boring in comparison. If you choose personal hobbies that are just as engaging—sports or a creative hobby for example—you won't be as tempted to work all the time.
- **Get dressed for work in the morning.** Take a shower and clean up instead of staying in your jammies all day. If you don't want to lose the comfort benefit of work-at-home, buy a special pair of work-only slippers that you put on when you're working and take off at the end of the workday.

Web Worker Daily writer Sabra Aaron offered some more ideas for separating work and home at <http://webworkerdaily.com/2007/03/23/when-worlds-collide-transitioning-between-work-and-home/>.

More connectedness

It can feel isolated and lonely at home. Stay connected:

- **Try social, connected productivity.** Just because you work at home doesn't mean you work alone. Stay in close touch with your coworkers and other associates using all the communications tools available to you. In *Connect!* I discuss the move towards social productivity, where people achieve high group productivity, sometimes at the expense of individual productivity, by being in close communication throughout the work day.
- **Use instant messaging or phone calls instead of always turning to email.** Asynchronous communications tools like email are good for working on your own schedule but don't give the same sense of social connection as synchronous or semi-synchronous tools like instant messaging.
- **Use microbloggers like Twitter or a team chat room to stay in touch.** Quick status updates to your team or other people you work with online can help you feel connected while at the same time allowing for a shared view of work getting done.
- **Join into a community of online workers.** Use blogging, discussion forums, social networking platforms, and other social web tools to meet and interact with people in your field, even if you're not working with them directly.
- **Get out for lunch or exercise with friends.** You could work all day but you don't have to. Take the time you've saved on commuting and spend it with friends during your workday.
- **Attend conferences in your field.** It can be refreshing and invigorating to hear about new advances in your field at the same time you meet with people you might only have interacted with online.
- **Try co-working.** Cooperative workspaces are popping up in high-tech cities around the world where telecommuters, freelancers, or entrepreneurs can work and socialize at the same time.

As you might have guessed from its title, *Connect!* is all about using the web to stay in touch with people. So you'll find a bunch more tips and resources in the book for avoiding isolation and loneliness when you work far from your colleagues.

For more help

We cover topics relevant to home-based workers (and anyone else wanting to succeed better at work using the web) every day at [Web Worker Daily](http://webworkerdaily.com/) (<http://webworkerdaily.com/>). Join us there as we figure out how the web revolutionizes work. And if you haven't already, pick up a copy of *Connect!* to get even more ideas about how to work for success and satisfaction using the web.

Like What You've Seen? Then Get the Book!

If you've enjoyed reading this "bonus" chapter,
be sure to pick up a copy of the book

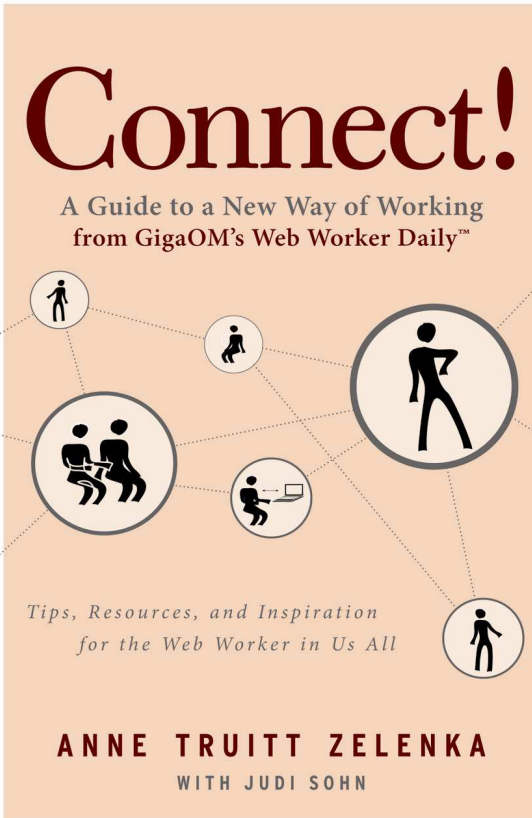


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Are you a web worker?

YOU ARE IF YOU USE THE WEB to reach out beyond the confines of your office, cubicle, home workspace, or seat at the coffee shop to connect and collaborate with others doing the same thing. In this book you’ll learn how to use new web tools to improve your work life. You’ll discover web sites and services you might want to try. You’ll meet the social web, where people are as important as corporations. You’ll learn how people like yourself are working in new ways because of the web, and how you can too.

REBOOTING THE WORKFORCE

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