

Professional Planning Forum



Professional
Planning Forum

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10th Anniversary

Homeworking

A Best Practice Guide

www.planningforum.co.uk

About the Planning Forum



As the independent industry body promoting effective resourcing and planning in the contact centre industry, we are supplier-independent and work across all industry sectors to provide specialist support for contact centre professionals who take resource planning seriously.

Our aims are to:

- **Promote best practice through research, site visits and networking**
- **Help your in-house support teams develop, by providing professional training and certification for analysts and specialists in these areas**
- **Establish better understanding and recognition within the industry of the role and contribution of planners**
- **Offer year-round advice and support for members of the Planning Forum**

The Forum's programmes offer expert training and support, so that you get the results you require. We offer networking and best practice events to learn from what works in other centres.

Our national forum for developing homeworking in contact centres provides practical guidance and material in this critical new area where managers and planners are now starting to make real progress in offering employment to people who might otherwise not join or stay. We believe that independent advice is critical to help organizations develop the understanding and confidence to adopt homeworking.

With specialist workstreams in Outbound, MI, Back office, Public sector transformation, Customer strategy and planning, Quality and performance management, Resource planning and our Director's forum, there is an opportunity for everyone to meet others who are facing the same challenges.

Our expert team of planning specialists, share between them over 50 years of call centre and planning experience. Why not use our breadth of experience to help you stimulate improvements in your own centre?

To find out more email info@planningforum.co.uk or ring +44 (0)333 123 59 60

More information is at www.planningforum.co.uk

"Now I can do my job better and with more confidence."

Amanda Hey,
Coors Brewers

"You don't know what you don't know."

Angela Craig,
Direct Line

"What I enjoyed most were the group discussions and the (informal) process benchmarking."

Stuart Green,
American Express

"Highly knowledgeable tutors."

Dave Parker,
DAS





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 - Find out about leading organisations who can help you implement homeworking successfully in your operation.

“The difficulty lies not in new ideas, but in escaping the old ones”
John Maynard Keynes, Economist

An introduction to homeworking

Dave Vernon outlines the advantages that homeworking can bring to your organisation and offers some practical guidance on getting started.



Across all types of business, managers are searching for a formula that combines high employee productivity, schedule

Research reveals that more than half of people that work from home find they are more productive ... [it] can result in a 40% reduction in absenteeism.

flexibility and low absenteeism and attrition. For most, this is an unobtainable dream. For those that embrace a homeworking strategy, the hope can quickly become reality.

Research conducted in 2007 on behalf of the Equal Opportunities Commission reveals that more than half of people that work from home find they are more productive. A more recent study carried out by research firm CRF Institute meanwhile shows that allowing employees to undertake homeworking can result in a 40% reduction in absenteeism. Contact centre operators that have embarked on homeworking schemes have enjoyed similarly positive results.

As our case studies demonstrate, homeworking can be highly fruitful. Canterbury City Council has witnessed a 20% uplift in productivity since it first enabled its contact centre advisors to work from home in early 2007. The television shopping channel QVC has benefited from a 13% rise in occupancy rates. Online and home shopping retailer Shop Direct,

estimates that it has saved 30% per agent, per year, using self-employed homeworkers rather than office-based staff to cope with volatile spikes in call demand.

Although not yet universally adopted by the UK contact centre community, homeworking has become increasingly easier to deploy in recent years. For the first time, this guide shows you the different types of models that are being used successfully in the UK and Europe. You can use this information now, to plan out the best way to implement a homeworking strategy in your own centre.

At the turn of the century, the cost of homeworking was simply too prohibitive for most organisations, with the price tag for installing the requisite ISDN line, mainframe technology and hardware amounting to several thousand pounds per agent. Indeed, even when home broadband connections started becoming more prolific a couple of years later, it was still too expensive for most organisations to provide connections in people's homes. Nor could they be guaranteed that the connections would be fast enough to allow homeworkers to do their job effectively.

QVC has benefited from a 13% rise in occupancy rates and Shop Direct estimates that it has saved 30% per agent, per year

Today, thanks to huge uplifts in home broadband speeds and the creation of thin client technology that enables homeworkers to access their organisation's applications and databases through a web browser, financial outlay is no longer a stumbling block. Security is no longer an issue, either, because

technology has improved so much that the same firewalls an organisation places around its networks can now be used to ring-fence homeworkers as well.

The benefits organisations can reap as a result of these technological advancements are huge. By giving people the opportunity to work from home, contact centre operators can protect themselves from the operational consequences of adverse events such as extreme weather, transport strikes or power outages – essentially using their homeworkers to facilitate disaster recovery.

The implementation of a homeworking strategy enables organisations to expand their talent pool as well. No longer restricted to recruiting people who live in close proximity to the bricks and mortar contact centre, managers can use homeworking as a means of attracting employees from a much wider geographical area. They can also use it to appeal to people with disabilities, carers and mothers with school-age children who might not otherwise consider a career in telephone-based customer service or sales.

Critically, contact centre operators can use homeworking to generate levels of flexibility that simply aren't achievable on-site; they can use it to build a more supple workforce that is geared up to work short stints – sometimes as little as 30 minutes apiece – or split-shifts designed to help the organisation better manage periods of peak call demand.

Naturally, there are counter-arguments against homeworking. Some organisations maintain it gives them insufficient control – despite the fact that remote monitoring technology is now so robust that managers can see exactly what status a homeworker is in at any one point of time, what



applications they have just accessed, and what data they have just input. Others assert that it is too difficult to establish and sustain relationships with homeworkers and that they are at risk of becoming isolated from their peers and disengaged from the culture of the organisation in question.

In reality, however, organisations already engaged in homeworking clearly feel the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages, and that it is entirely feasible to implement systems or procedures to overcome the drawbacks – for example, using webcams or videoconferencing tools to ensure homeworkers feel connected to their peers during team briefings or huddles.

Above all, this is an approach that generates huge business benefits, but is also massively popular with those who want to work from home. As the case studies illustrate, people love the flexibility they themselves gain, they are happy working from home and build different ways of socialising, they love the fact that they save time and money on travel. Homeworking is not the solution for everyone, but find the right people, offer them the right model of homeworking and

homeworking – be it for cost-saving, cultural or other motives – and the sort of activities you would potentially allocate to people working from home, assessing the various pros and cons from a financial, cultural and technical viewpoint.

Remember, too, that a pilot is just that. If the trial doesn't go the way you expect, don't dismiss homeworking out of hand. Analyse the setbacks you've come across and look for practical solutions. It could be that your original choice of model isn't quite right. If that is the case, follow the example set out in the British Gas case study and try an alternative strategy.

Thanks to huge uplifts in home broadband speeds and the creation of thin client technology ... financial outlay is no longer a stumbling block. Security is no longer an issue, either

Once you have decided which model is likely to work best for your organisation, try to find some examples of other contact centre operators that have already adopted the strategy and talk to the relevant managers to understand how they trialled and rolled out the scheme, remembering to ask critical questions around the length and size of the pilot and what – if any – third party technology companies or consultants were involved.

It is important to be frank during these discussions. Ask what unexpected obstacles or teething problems they faced, and how these were overcome. Also enquire as to

However you choose to progress your homeworking plans, keep in mind that help is at hand. The Professional Planning Forum is just one of many organisations that can assist you in formulating a successful homeworking strategy, and we hope that the contents of this guide will prove useful in setting you on your way.

Dave Vernon is the Planning Forum's Homeworking Champion and Head of Best Practice. He can be contacted on dave.vernon@planningforum.co.uk and 01663 746 772. Follow him on Twitter and Linked In.

Contact centres can generate levels of flexibility that simply aren't achievable on-site; they can use it to build a more supple workforce that is geared up to work short stints

there can be a real win for both business and employee.

So, how should you get started with homeworking? What can you do to ensure a successful implementation?

From our experience of talking with members, the first thing we at the Professional Planning Forum would advise is to appoint a project manager to oversee the scheme, and coordinate with them to evaluate the different homeworking models outlined here in this guide. Together, consider the type of organisation you are, the reasons why you want to deploy

how the organisation secured stakeholder buy-in for the project. In this guide, our Business Case section offers a concise set of guidelines on how to get all the key stakeholders onboard.

Before deploying your own pilot, talk to your grass-roots staff and make them aware of why the homeworking scheme is going to be put in place, what it will mean for them and how it will impact on the contact centre. The key is to engage everyone at an early stage: to make them aware of how homeworking operates and to potentially source recruits to work in this way.





Arise is now the leading provider of virtual business services serving 45 clients with customised virtual solutions through 18,000 Arise Certified Professionals in UK, Ireland, USA and Canada. "At Home" is all we do. Our local agents work from their own homes using our patented technologies. Arise's Home Shoring provides our clients with cost effective solutions, even against off-shore services, at a high quality and with a much better cultural fit. Our market is growing rapidly, especially in the current economic climate.

In 2008 Arise entered the UK market and began working with Shop Direct Group. Arise has recently launched its second UK client and has an active pipeline of further client discussions. Arise is unique in the UK market due to the proven technologies and processes that have been developed at scale by our US parent over 13 years. Our agents are sourced from a huge range of locations across the UK and Ireland, and come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Our 1,000 agents are passionate about our model and many recommend their family and friends to us as potential agents of the future.

Arise are committed to growing the UK business and expanding into mainland Europe. Our recent success has seen us courted by various MPs as Arise is well placed to exploit the expansion of the new high speed broadband network, bringing many more quality agents into reach. You will find plenty of reasons within these pages as to why Home Shoring will be huge in 2011; Arise aims to be at the leading edge of the frontier expansion

Our agents find value in our:

- Flexibility – agents choose where & when they work, wide range of demographics and minority groups otherwise excluded from more traditional workplace
- Self employed model – agents run their own business or to join others as they choose
- No travel time – 100% work from home opportunity
- Opportunity to work with a range of clients across a range of different market sectors
- Online support – all agents are provided with feedback on performance with opportunities to grow
- New opportunities – ability to live somewhere that they choose rather than where the work is

Our clients find value in our:

- On Demand Model – only pay when we work
- Flexibility – resources scheduled in 30 min segments to cover daily, weekly, monthly & seasonal peaks
- Business Continuity – our resources are home based spread across regions and so they're not affected by extreme weather, transportation issues etc
- Access to talent - source talent countrywide, not limited by proximity to a particular centre
- Performance – our agents choose the brand they work on, invest in getting through training etc at their own cost and are paid by results. Performance culture with higher levels of self motivation leading to superior sales & service

"Arise has been able to consistently meet our service level expectations- not only on a month-to-month or week-to-week basis but on a day-to-day, half-hour-to-half hour basis."

Senior Customer Service Exec,
Fortune 50 Publishing Company

"What Arise brings is a fresh pair of eyes; it brings a fresh talent base to the business that we have not been able to tap into previously."

Customer Experience Director
Leading UK Retailer



On Recruitment...



Kevin Beattie, Resource Planning Manager, QVC

Don't only consider your current pool of staff when looking for homeworkers. Remember that these people have chosen to work in your offices for a reason: they probably like the camaraderie and being part of a team. Homeworkers are often a different breed. They work best when they're on their own, or might have reasons to work from home – for example, a medical condition. The key is to know what kind of individuals you want to employ as homeworkers, and to target them specifically in your recruitment drive.



Vaishali Malvi, Project Manager (Service and Repair), British Gas

You must accept the reality that homeworking is not for everyone. Some individuals thrive in a busy call centre environment motivated by their team, where others would prefer the comfort and quiet of their own homes.



Paul Milloy, Head of Resource and Planning (Service and Repair), British Gas

When we started recruiting for new 'OffHome' workers, we put together roadshows, which we took to our various sites to give existing staff members an understanding of what homeworking is all about. To make these more effective, we got OffHome workers from our pilot to attend the roadshows and provide a 'warts and all' view of how it is working from home. Doing this helped ensure that only those who were genuinely interested would volunteer for the next round.



Kevin Beattie, Resource Planning Manager, QVC

You won't see your homeworkers as often as your regular staff members, so it's a good idea to spend more time with candidates during the recruitment phase to make sure they are genuinely the right people for the job. We brought our candidates in three times after the initial interview, and spent a lot of that time painting a picture of what life would be like as a homeworker. This has helped keep attrition rates down.



Danny Gunn, Head of Planning and Resource – Contact Centres and Financial Services, Shop Direct Group

If you choose an operating model that uses remote, self-employed homeworkers, be prepared for it to take longer to get people up to speed when training. We've found that it takes more time when people aren't based in the physical contact centre. My advice to others would be to over-resource remote training tools like the nursery, grad bay and so on. Also, offer up extra support through trainers and team leaders to help nurture remote workers and stop them feeling isolated during coaching.

On Strategy...



Kevin Beattie, Resource Planning Manager, QVC

Decide what homeworking strategy works best for your business. We piloted a couple of different models – including getting our homeworkers to work from the office half of the time – before deciding on the one that was right for us.



Paul Milloy, Head of Resource and Planning (Service and Repair), British Gas

Always make sure you pilot before embarking on a homeworking scheme. That way, you can work out what operating model works best for your business.

On Logistics...



Vaishali Malvi, OffHome Project Manager, (Service and Repair), British Gas

It's really important your people understand what working from home will mean for them in the long-term. For most individuals, it's a decision that will affect their home life and family, so it's important to ensure they are given adequate time to make the decision.



Cathy Eastwood, Customer Services Manager, Canterbury City Council

When you're doing your initial assessment of an individual's suitability to work from home, make sure they have room to carry out their job effectively. They need to have a contained space for their work, away from children, pets or other distractions.



Danny Gunn, Head of Planning and Resource – Contact Centres and Financial Services, Shop Direct Group

Even if you have lots of self-employed, remote homeworkers, don't expect them to all agree to work at one particular time – say a Monday morning. You can't rely on your homeworkers to fill a shift entirely on their own. We work on the premise that we will get a maximum of 40% of total homeworkers concurrently in any interval we publish in our schedule.



Maureen Ferguson, Resource Planning Manager, Carnival UK

Rather than having a dedicated 'team' of homeworkers, we allocate individual homeworkers to existing teams within the call centre. This means that they always have an in-house team leader and colleagues to talk to – something we encourage them to do using instant messaging (IM) as well as the phone.



Danny Gunn, Head of Planning and Resource – Contact Centres and Financial Services, Shop Direct Groups

Don't automatically assume that you will observe less absenteeism or attrition using self-employed homeworkers. We have found that sickness and churn rates are pretty much the same for this population as they are within our actual contact centres.



Vaishali Malvi, OffHome Project Manager, (Service and Repair), British Gas

It is critical to ensure you consider the health and safety aspects of working from home, just as you would in the office. We completed rigorous risk assessments and home suitability checks to ensure our people had safe working environments at home and understood the health and safety implications of working from home.

On Communication...

Passionate About Performance

Planning to be the best



Cathy Eastwood, Customer Services Manager, Canterbury City Council

Our staff typically deal with between five and ten angry or abusive customers every day, and when they're in the office, they have people around them to talk through these calls and help them feel better. People working from home don't have this face-to-face contact however, so it's important to offer them a means of communication with their peers and manager that will give them the support they need. We always have a duty manager available to answer calls from our homeworking staff. In addition, we're looking at the possibility of introducing webcams to our homeworkers' offices, which should help remove some of the feelings of isolation that can arise



Danny Gunn, Head of Planning and Resource – Contact Centres and Financial Services, Shop Direct Group

If you're using a third party to provide self-employed homeworkers, make sure you have communication mechanisms in place to help instil your business' culture and team ethos within those people. At Shop Direct, we've already done this to a certain extent by introducing chat forums that enable our remote homeworkers to liaise with their peers and managers in the physical contact centres. However, we're currently looking at additional mechanisms to make that more robust.

On Technology...



Paul Milloy, Head of Resource and Planning (Service and Repair), British Gas

Don't let IT hold you back. There are a lot of technology companies out there who can implement homeworking on your behalf at relatively little cost. Some will even manage your homeworking estate, if you need them to. It doesn't need to be done in-house.



Cathy Eastwood, Customer Services Manager, Canterbury City Council

When we first embarked on homeworking, we didn't actually have voice over IP (VoIP) technology in place, which resulted in us having to physically send calls onto our homeworking staff. This ended up being quite costly, and I would advise other organisations thinking about homeworking to have the right technology in place before they begin a pilot. Some VoIP providers offer free or low-cost trials, and these can be a useful way of testing the technology as well as homeworking itself.

On Engagement...



Paul Milloy, Head of Resource and Planning (Service and Repair), British Gas

Remember that your homeworkers are just as much a part of your business as office-based employees. It's important to include them in all the activities you run for people physically located in the call centre. Make sure they are invited to team outings and are involved in relevant incentives and award programmes.



Maureen Ferguson, Resource Planning Manager, Carnival UK

The little things count as much to homeworkers as they do to office-based staff. Here at Carnival, we regularly give out bottles of wine and gift vouchers as 'thank yous' to our staff. We always include our homeworkers when we're doing this, and will either wait for them to come into the office to present them with their reward, or will get the team leader to deliver and present the 'thank you' to them at their home.

A fully serviced 'Office in a Box' to support your home based employees

The Cloudbase proposition is very simple...

Cloudbase transforms the cost structure of your business operations by helping you deploy a home based strategy for your employees. We provide your employees with a fully managed IT and telephony infrastructure in the home enabling the same secure systems access to required information and telecommunications as they would have working in your office. We conduct health and safety assessments, support your employer's duty of care, assist with recruitment and provide the ongoing technical support for your home based employees anywhere in the UK. Our feature rich managed service offers flexible options and contract terms providing you with a very attractive operating expense model that will address many of your business needs.

Comprehensive planning , deployment & ongoing support for your organisation

A complete cost benefit analysis and initial stakeholder engagement workshop

Management readiness support including workflow management, employee engagement, employers duty of care, contracts of employment, home working policies, home based employee recruitment and technology infrastructure

Delivery of a working Proof of Concept solution and management of your Home Working pilot program

Delivery and set up of a home base employee 'Office in a Box' including annual health and safety assessment, approved furniture, IT and telephony infrastructure

UK wide home based employee technical helpline and equipment break/fix and replacement service

Our CloudCover engineers are all Cloudbase badged and checked annually by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). They are all fully equipped and ready to support your home based employees anywhere in the country. Their role is to ensure that your home based employees are supported, available and ready to provide a high quality service to your customers.



The key features:

- Annual home work area Health & Safety Assessment
- Electrical PAT testing of all home work area equipment
- Delivery and set up of 'Office in a Box' equipment including approved desk, chair, lighting personal computer, telephone handset, headset, business grade router and any other equipment required by the home agent to perform their role.
- Provision of a business grade broadband line for secure access to your corporate infrastructure (if required).
- Provision of a cloud hosted telephony environment to provide a feature rich unified communications and home agent management solution (if required).
- UK wide CloudCover engineering and technical support.
- A complete home working solution at a fraction of the cost of a traditional workplace environment including all the home based IT, telephony and support for a low monthly fee with flexible contract terms.



The key benefits:

- Enhanced workforce flexibility and load balancing capabilities improving service quality and productivity.
- Enables recruitment from a broader and more diverse talent pool to improve service quality and reduce employee attrition and associated costs.
- An operating expense based model that limits your need for further capital expenditure or investment in property assets.
- A move from a fixed cost to a more flexible cost operating model.
- A more resilient organisation capable of operating during fire, flood and weather related disruption.
- A proactive approach to reducing the carbon footprint of your organisation.

Built in business resilience

A well supported home working strategy will allow your business to continue operating during severe weather disruption, civil unrest or national pandemics. It can also form part of your Business Continuity Plan should you experience a denial of access to your normal place of work due to fire, flood or other unplanned disruption.



Visit us at www.cloudbasesystems.com
Contact us at enquiries@cloudbasesystems.com


Innovative Home Working Solutions



The home-based employee

Currently, the most common type of contact centre homeworker in the UK is the home-based employee: an individual who is recruited, trained and employed directly by the contact centre operator.

Essentially this model involves replicating a bricks and mortar operation out in the field. Home-based employees are usually provided with the same technical equipment, coaching and team leader support that they would receive in the office. They also access the same programmes and systems used by in-house staff, although these are typically delivered using thin-client technology over a broadband connection.

Who does it suit?

Organisations that want their homeworkers to deal with more complex enquiries. This is possible because the contact centre has complete control over training, and can coach home-based employees to the same level of expertise they would expect to see from in-house staff.

Pros

- This is a tried and tested homeworking model that has been deployed by several contact centre operators across the UK. Case studies are readily available, offering facts and figures to vouch for the model's success rates, making it a lot easier to sell the concept to senior executives of organisations that have yet to embark on a homeworking pilot
- Because home-based employees have access to the same communication channels, benefits, rewards and incentives as their office-based peers, they tend to be more engaged and therefore less likely to look for other jobs once installed
- It gives the contact centre more control. In a disaster recovery situation, for example, the contact centre has immediate access to its homeworkers rather than having to rely on a third party to communicate on its behalf

Cons

- Employing homeworkers direct means that the contact centre has to provide the infrastructure and technology to enable staff to carry out their duties from home. Capital expenditure can be high, although these costs can be mitigated to some degree by using a third party IT specialist
- This is a resource-heavy model. Time will need to be spent writing processes for home-based employees and for analysing, testing and fine-tuning schedule fit



"Some individuals thrive in a busy call centre, where others would prefer the comfort and quiet of their own homes."

Vaishali Malvi, Project Manager
(Service and Repair),
British Gas

"Factor in your need to physically meet up ... you might need to hold regional team meetings or training sessions occasionally."

Steve Mosser, Chief Executive Officer,
Sensée

The self-employed homeworker

As the title suggests, the self-employed homeworker works for themselves either as a sole trader or having set themselves up as a limited company. Typically, they will sign up to an agency that will provide them with access to clients once they have passed basic proficiency tests.

A self-employed homeworker will regularly take calls for several clients and will create their own roster of work based around their personal needs as well as the schedules of available slots presented to them by their clients. As a rule, the schedules on offer are comprised of small, 'bite-sized' shifts, often as short as 30 minutes apiece.

The model was first developed in the United States, where it continues to have high levels of penetration.

Who does it suit?

Organisations with volatile call patterns – on the basis that self-employed homeworkers can be scheduled to work for as little as 30 minutes at a time – or those that face exponential seasonal uplift but do not want the cost or HR burden associated with bringing temporary staff into their contact centre.

Pros

- It is one of the most cost-effective models as the contact centre operator only need pay the homeworker for talk-time and wrap, and can schedule them in for as little as 30 minutes per shift. Self-employed homeworkers do not receive any payment for sickness or holidays
- Organisations looking for personnel to fulfil basic duties such as order-taking can often use the agency partner to train self-employed homeworkers, thus removing the onus from their in-house training team

Cons

- Because self-employed homeworkers have several clients at any one time, there is only so much knowledge they can retain for each one. Their level of expertise tends to be limited and it is therefore not recommended that they are used to handle complex queries
- Contact centre operators cannot expect to build the same kind of relationship with their self-employed homeworkers as they do with their in-house staff. Levels of engagement might suffer as a result



“Working flexible hours has given me freedom ... I have had 4-5 different opportunities ... working from home is fantastic especially with the bad weather!”

Nicola, Self-Employed Homeworker, with Arise Virtual Solutions

“Don’t expect them to all agree to work at one particular time – say a Monday morning ... We work on the premise that we will get a maximum of 40% ... in any interval we publish in our schedule.”

Danny Gunn, Head of Planning and Resource, Shop Direct Group



The homeworking outsourcer

In recent years a few specialist homeworking businesses have emerged to assist companies wanting to deliver a homeworking solution. These businesses provide a range of products and services to make contact centre homeworking a reality. They differ from normal contact centre outsourcers in that they can provide the provision of professional services, remote recruitment, training and management tools, the IT and Telephony infrastructures, and in some instance the homeworkers themselves. This can differ on a case by case basis once the tactical and strategic business requirements have been agreed between the company and the outsourcer.

Who 'owns' the homeworker is usually a hot topic in this model, and generally the specialist provider positions their own homeworkers for the initial engagement to demonstrate quality gains and cost reductions while lowering risk for the client contact centre. Once this is proven, however, options open on how the model expands especially around the workforce used.

Who does it suit?

Organisations that want the benefits of homeworking but equally do not want to go on the journey alone. The specialist providers can design, build and even operate on behalf of the client delivering the benefits of homeworking, whilst negating a lot of the risk.

Pros

- This is a good model for organisations that want to pilot the potential for homeworking but don't have the necessary resources to do so in-house. Giving its outsourced partner responsibility for the pilot can be a win-win situation; the organisation can test the viability of homeworking without having to dedicate operational, HR, IT or advisor-level staff to the trial, while the outsourcer has the opportunity to impress its client
- Usually delivered through a shared risk approach with the outsourcer, with clear success targets set out early in the engagement, thereby minimising capital investments for the customer. Most importantly, the homeworking outsourcer will act as a safe pair of hands for the operation and equip it with the knowledge to successful homeworking

Cons

- There are currently very few active examples of outsourced homeworking in the UK. Not having case studies to reference can be a stumbling block in attempting to win executive buy-in. As is the case with self-employed homeworkers, organisations might not enjoy the same levels of engagement in their outsourced homeworker community as they do with their own in-house staff. They may also have difficulty building engagement as the relationship is managed by a third party rather than directly



“Choose an area that has the least complicated workflow to pilot the programme. Once established ... expand from the pilot bed to other contact types.”

Steve Mosser, Chief Executive Officer, Senseé

“Always pilot before embarking on a homeworking scheme. That way, you can work out what operating model works best for your business.”

Paul Milloy, Head of Resource and Planning (Service and Repair), British Gas



The hybrid homeworker

Hybrid homeworkers are employed members of staff who spend a portion of their business hours in the office and the remainder working from home.

Schedule patterns are not necessarily fixed; in a given period, a hybrid homeworker may spend alternate days in the office, or a week at home followed by a week in the contact centre.

Rosters are usually determined between two months and three weeks in advance according to the needs of both the contact centre and the individual.

Who does it suit?

Organisations that want the flexibility that homeworking offers, but also need staff to be present in the office either on an ad hoc or regular basis. The model is particularly popular with smaller, public sector 'one stop shop' contact centres where staff are expected to spend a portion of their time in face-to-face contact with customers.

Pros

- It gives organisations an extra mechanism with which to manage unexpected call demand – particularly early in the morning, during the evening or over weekends, when the contact centre is usually less well-staffed. It also provides a means of disaster recovery, for example, enabling employees to work from home if bad weather conditions prevent them from travelling to the office
- Hybrid homeworkers rarely feel detached or isolated from their peers. Camaraderie remains high because staff members still see each other and their team managers on a regular basis

Cons

- The model does not expand a workforce exponentially. Managers still have to rely on the same group of people – whether they are working in the office or from home – and cannot therefore expect to achieve the flexibility they would observe with other models, for example, a self-employed homeworker strategy that ramps up the volume of homeworkers in line with increased call demand
- Staff typically need to live in close proximity to the contact centre in order to travel in for their office-based shifts. This could potentially dilute the pool of available staff



“When you’re doing your initial assessment of an individual’s suitability to work from home, make sure ... they have a contained space for their work, away from children, pets or other distractions.”

Cathy Eastwood, Customer Services Manager
Canterbury City Council

“With the right technology it’s possible to set up ‘occasional’ home workers when required. Calls can be diverted to agents’ homes in adverse weather.”

Jonathan Grant, CEO ,
NewVoiceMedia



The community homeworker

People who fall into this category are not homeworkers in the true sense of the word as they will typically be employed alongside other individuals in small satellite contact centres, usually some distance away from the main office, rather than working by themselves from their own homes.

Satellite contact centres – or ‘hubs’ as they are sometimes referred to – tend to be built around a specific community, for instance, rural villages or deprived inner-city or suburban districts.

Who does it suit?

Organisations looking to employ people in discreet locations – for example, individuals with a personal knowledge of a particular area – or those organisations whose corporate social responsibility (CSR) objectives state that they should attempt to employ people from communities where there is a high concentration of worklessness.

Pros

- In many cases, contact centres will be able to use an existing community hub rather than having to set one up from scratch. Rural, inner-city and suburban community associations will sometimes provide preferential rates to access the hubs on a long-term basis. They will also usually supply a database of potential community homeworkers and, because these people live in areas of extreme deprivation, may even be able to access government funds on the contact centre’s behalf to help cover the cost of training
- Having a small community of homeworkers in the same physical location can help combat the problem of isolation that individuals often feel when they work entirely on their own

Cons

- Like outsourced homeworking, there are currently very few contact centre operators utilising this model at present, which may dilute its attraction for senior stakeholders within the organisation
- The model is not normally as flexible as employing people to work from their own homes because community hubs tend to have set opening and closing hours. Staff members also have to make a journey to the hub – however short – in order to fulfil a shift and are therefore less likely than a pure homeworker to take on short stints of work, such as 30 minutes of backfill



“Homeworking needn’t add complexity to rotas – if anything increased flexibility should make things easier.”

David Jones, Director ,
Q-Max Systems



ContactWorld from NewVoiceMedia enables companies to implement home working strategies, so agents and supervisors can work away from the office as their situation dictates.

Sign up to ContactWorld for a one month free trial to see how easy it is to set up home agents. Visit www.newvoicemedia.com/homeworking/ for full details.

“Home working means that we can spread our staff requirements across all our trading hours so we are broadening the recruitment net, saving on office costs, and reducing our carbon footprint. ContactWorld enables us to do this successfully.”

Mal Barritt, Director,
Cruise118

“ContactWorld supported us to implement a home working strategy with ease. As a result our customer service levels remain high and I’m able to hold onto key staff.”

Sarah Barrow, Wokingham Direct Manager,
Wokingham Borough Council

“With ContactWorld we have implemented a flexible and scalable telephony solution that easily allows staff to work from home and importantly, remain accountable,”

Jane Midwood, Operations Manager,
Seymour Hunter



NEWVOICEMEDIA

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Finance Director



Knowing how to present the rationale for homeworking to the Finance Director within your organisation can make a very real difference as to whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Look for a cost-related catalyst for change

If the organisation is already questioning why it is employing so many temporary staff or the owner of the contact centre premises has decided not to renew your lease, it could be the perfect opportunity to propose the concept of homeworking to the finance director as a means of reducing capital expenditure.

Expose hidden costs

Talk the finance director through problems they might not automatically associate with expenditure. For example, if your contact centre suffers from high attrition, emphasise the financial burden this creates in recruiting and training replacement staff, and use it as a line of reasoning to deploy homeworkers instead.

Undertake cost-benefit analysis

Having decided which model of homeworking has the best strategic and cultural fit for your organisation, carry out research on the cost-benefit ratio that you can then present to the finance director.

Use case studies

Giving the finance director some examples of successful homeworking implementations can be particularly effective if they're accompanied by data to show how cost-savings have been realised.



“Homeworking is no longer just an opportunity to reduce operating costs, it is now a competitive advantage within the markets that your organisation serves.”

Peter Hubbard, Managing Director,
Cloudbase Systems Ltd

“Financial output from a workforce management system provides accurate details of staff costs for management purposes.”

David Jones, Director,
Q-Max Systems

Top Tips

- Take a wide and full view of the business case. What are the risks to customer experience, training costs and real ROI?
- What would ‘on demand’ resourcing give you? Calculate the benefits of flexibility. What could adding 2 hours more to your servicing day bring to you? Or the ability to add hours during a promotion and reduce again when complete? What does the winter weather really cost you?
- What costs do you displace? What would you add? Homeworking helps with real estate costs but keeps many of the employment on-costs.
- Self employed homeworkers typically run at 90% utilization vs 60-75% for in-house centres.
- Clients have realised cost savings of 30% – 50% vs their in-house centres, have driven sales increases of 5 - 20% per agent and matched or beaten their in-house customer experience scores.

David Cartwright, Group Chief Executive EMEA
Arise Virtual Solutions



The business case for...

Head of IT

Knowing how to present the rationale for homeworking to the head of IT within your organisation can make a very real difference as to whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Emphasise the availability of homeworking IT specialists

Research the many companies that can install technology specifically designed to help contact centre staff work from home, and use this information to demonstrate to the head of IT that the burden of implementation needn't rest solely on them. Highlight the variety of available suppliers and the fact that some can offer full infrastructure installations, including hardware, while others will focus on the provision of thin-client technology on a 'pay-as-you-go' basis.

Outline the benefits of using a third party supplier

Underscore the other advantages to be gained by using external homeworking technology specialists – for instance, their ability to integrate their own next-generation technology with the contact centre's existing platforms, or the fact that they can provide maintenance as part of their offering.

Orchestrate discussions with IT heads in other homeworking contact centres

Seek out IT-related case studies on homeworking implementations and find the names and contact details of the relevant IT managers. Setting up conversations between your own head of IT and their equivalent in another organisation will give them the opportunity to learn first-hand how effective homeworking can be from a technical perspective.



“A successful homeworking strategy in any organisation is driven by the demands of the business and not by the technology.”

Peter Hubbard, Managing Director,
Cloudbase Systems Ltd

“Some VoIP providers offer free or low-cost trials, and these can be a useful way of testing the technology as well as homeworking itself.”

Cathy Eastwood, Customer Services
Manager,
Canterbury City Council

Top Tips

Technology should not be a barrier to using homeworkers. Systems have been developed to ensure secure transactions and communications can be processed cost effectively. Make sure your technology can provide real time visibility of agent's activity, phone and PC, as well as support them through the escalation process (eg hand off calls to other team members).

Steve Mosser, Chief Executive Officer,
Sensée

It's a good idea to implement a paperless office where all documents are stored virtually so home workers get the same access to information as office workers. With the right technology it's possible to set up 'occasional' home workers when required.

Jonathan Grant, CEO,
NewVoiceMedia

The HR team

Knowing how to present the rationale for homeworking to the HR team within your organisation can make a very real difference as to whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Promote the work-life balance benefits

Most HR executives are tasked with finding ways of delivering an optimum work-life balance for employees. Use real-life examples to show how homeworking can reduce travel times and costs, and allow remote workers to spend more time with their family.

Illustrate how homeworking can increase diversity

When you advertise for homeworkers, you appeal to an array of individuals that you might not otherwise attract – including people with disabilities, carers and mothers with school-age children. Emphasise this point to help the HR team understand how your organisation might become an employer of choice.

Highlight the life-skills and sticking power of older homeworkers

Homeworking is an activity usually undertaken by home-owners or those who rent larger properties with a room that they can dedicate to their job. People that fall into this bracket are often from a more mature demographic – something that can be used as a major selling point in negotiations with the HR team on the basis that older staff members tend to bring life experience with them when they start a new job. They are also more likely to stay with an organisation than their younger colleagues, which can have a positive impact on attrition levels.



“I can still work from my office in the garden ... and I can work when I want. It doesn't get better than this.”

Nicola, Self-Employed Homeworker, with Arise Virtual Solutions

“You won't see your homeworkers as often as your regular staff members, so it's a good idea to spend more time with candidates during the recruitment phase to make sure they are genuinely the right people for the job.”

Kevin Beattie, Resource Planning Manager, QVC

Top Tips

A homeworking strategy is an excellent way to accommodate staff who may have a change in their circumstances. It allows companies to retain valuable, experienced employees and deploy them in a location or time that fits with their lifestyle.

Jonathan Grant, CEO,
NewVoiceMedia

For the best results consider recruiting from scratch. Remember that your own in-house staff have been recruited with different disciplines in mind and different attitudes; it is therefore more difficult to convert a centre worker into the home. You can also recruit with the flexibility you desire; when recruiting from scratch legacy shifts do not apply.

Steve Mosser, Chief Executive Officer,
Sensée

The business case for...

Operational managers

Knowing how to present the rationale for homeworking to the operational managers within your organisation can make a very real difference as to whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Focus on productivity

Most homeworkers are scheduled to work shorter shift patterns to cover periods of high call demand. Because of this and the fact that they work on their own and don't have the same interruptions as office-based staff, they tend to be more productive. Finding case studies that corroborate these points can help secure the buy-in of sceptical peers in operational management.

Reveal the potential for disaster recovery

Operational executives are likely to be impressed if they are presented with an outline of how homeworking can provide instant business continuity in light of temporary office shut-downs.

Scrutinise the true cost of overtime to the business

Contact centre operators often have to ask staff members to work overtime during periods of high call demand and this can prove costly not only in terms of remuneration, but also because employees can be fatigued and therefore less efficient when doing overtime work. Demonstrating how homeworkers can mitigate the need for overtime can be an effective way of promoting a homeworking model because it clearly offers both financial and operational benefits.



"We allocate individual homeworkers to already existing teams within the call centre. This means that they always have an in-house team leader and colleagues to talk to – something we encourage them to do using instant messaging (IM) as well as the phone."

Maureen Ferguson, Resource Planning Manager, Carnival UK

"Smart managers have realised that a home based strategy actually removes complexity from their day to day management rather than adding to it."

Peter Hubbard, Managing Director, Cloudbase Systems Ltd

Top Tips

- Keep your homeworkers involved – they are still part of the team
- Use an agent adherence system to monitor activity
- Give homeworkers regular updates on service levels and performance
- Use an agent desktop system pro-actively for sending messages
- Allow home-workers to swap shifts between themselves – they are the best judge of their availability

David Jones, Director,
Q-Max Systems

Grass-roots employees

Knowing how to present the rationale for homeworking to the grass-roots employees within your organisation can make a very real difference as to whether the proposal is accepted or not.

Promote the financial benefits

Get staff to analyse their expenditure on their daily commute into work and any items they might purchase in the office that they wouldn't spend as much on at home – for example, coffee and snacks. The savings made by working at home can be sold as an effective pay rise.

Highlight potential improvements in work-life balance

Providing grass-roots employees with stark facts can be a way of encouraging them to give homeworking a go. For instance, talk about how cutting out travel times means they get to spend extra hours with their family.

Guarantee the same levels of support

Staff who have already worked in a bricks and mortar contact centre typically expect their team manager to provide whatever help and encouragement they need. When promoting the concept of homeworking, give staff assurances that they will receive the same amount of support, albeit delivered through instant messaging, emails or over the phone rather than face-to-face.

Elaborate on flexible working

The most effective homeworking models are those that embrace flexible working such as split shifts. Employees thinking about homeworking should be made aware of the benefits of flexible schedules. Encourage them to consider what they might do with four hours of free time during the day. By visualising this potential, employees are more likely to consider homeworking as an option.



“Being in control of when and how long I work for, means I can fit in my other commitments. I can choose to work a little in the morning, afternoon and evening if I have things to do, without the travelling in between.”

Julie, Self-Employed Homeworker, with Arise Virtual Solutions

“Management readiness and employee engagement are the true keys to the success of any homeworking strategy.”

Peter Hubbard, Managing Director, Cloudbase Systems Ltd

Top Tips

It's important to remember that home workers may suffer from loss of 'osmosis' of knowledge gained in an office environment. It's essential to include them in regular team meetings and training sessions so they stay up to date with all developments and don't feel cut off from the rest of the team.

Jonathan Grant, CEO,
NewVoiceMedia

Homeworkers need to feel supported and part of the overall team, not second class citizens. Ensure that comms systems can give instant access to other remote team members and in-house teams for effective escalations and to build team camaraderie.

Steve Mosser, Chief Executive Officer,
Sensée



Homeworking – Getting the Technology Right

David Jones of Q-Max Workforce Management takes a look at how technology enables homeworking and secure payments



As the case study from Canterbury City Council illustrates homeworking can be highly beneficial. However, the right technology has to be in place to support this flexible, but potentially more complex method of working.

Technology

Canterbury provides home-workers with a VoIP phone and employees use their own PCs and broadband to connect to a VPN. This creates a secure environment because no Council software or data is held on employees' home equipment. More importantly, the Council avoids upfront IT costs. Homeworking can also add to the challenge of efficient rota scheduling.

Business case +

At Canterbury typically, one full-time business analyst spent a minimum of two days per week planning rotas. A further half day was spent by team leaders making on-the-day rota adjustments due to demand changes or absenteeism.

After a rigorous evaluation of the marketplace Q-Max won the WFM business based on its reputation for training support and after sales service. Once selected, Q-Max consultants spent time understanding

the exact requirements so that final outputs from the software saved time and resource. All contact centre staff were then trained so that they were up and running and self-sufficient as

“Q-Max has revolutionised our reporting processes and has enabled supervisors to spend more time managing their team rather than their rotas.”

Cathy Eastwood, Customer Service Manager at Canterbury City Council

quickly as possible.

Tangible results

The deployment of Q-Max has reaped tangible benefits for Canterbury City Council. By installing Q-Max Agent Desktop, contact centre advisors can 'self-serve' on rota changes or enter leave/absence requests. They now feel empowered and confident they can communicate requests and changes with their supervisors irrespective of their daily location.

The overall handling of leave and homeworking requests as well as shift swaps now happens quickly and within a single system into which staff data is also integrated and provided seamlessly to HR. All budgets are loaded into Q-Max and it is now far easier to provide more accurate details of staff costs for management purposes.

Automation

Handling payment calls through a 'live' customer service advisor and using written forms to process them, took an average of 5 minutes to complete and with 95 transactions per day, this

meant the time of 1.2 full-time equivalent staff every day. By automating the payment process using a secure encrypted payment system the Council complied with Payment Card Industry (PCI) standards because credit card details were no longer recorded or written down by an advisor.

This automation further enabled the implementation of homeworking.

The council turned to Telephonetics VIP to provide an automatic but secure payment solution. It is estimated that this technology has saved one full-time equivalent person, with the average costs per call reduced from £3.10 to just 34p per call.

Automation is an essential part of Canterbury City Council's ability to improve customer satisfaction while reducing overall operating costs. The proof is in the pudding and the contact centre has customer satisfaction levels consistently at 94% either "satisfied" or "very satisfied".

By combining efficient telecommunication, workforce management and automated payment technology Canterbury City Council has successfully implemented homeworking and is leading the way for both public sector and commercial organisations to follow.

“We are passionate about service delivery. However, our increasingly complex working environment meant that we required a solution that could help us overcome this hurdle.”

Cathy Eastwood, Customer Service Manager at Canterbury City Council



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Case Study...

The AA



Breakdown services company the AA became one of the first businesses in the UK to test the potential of homeworking when it piloted a virtual call centre in the Leeds area back in 1997.

Productivity and employee retention

At the time, the business was looking for a way to better manage peaks in its call demand. Specifically, it needed to ramp up staff numbers around 'drive times' such as morning and evening rush hours.

By introducing homeworking on a split-shift basis, the company quickly realised productivity gains. Moreover, it also witnessed a marked improvement in staff retention rates – so much so, in fact, that the pilot was expanded to 150 FTE over the coming ten years.

Homeworking as a core strategy

By 2007, the AA had decided to adopt homeworking as a core strategy – partly in response to the consolidation of its physical call centres and the need to retain experienced employees, but also as a better means of managing drive times and providing call-out contingency. Brand new homeworking staff were recruited from the outside, again on a split-shift basis, taking the total number of home-based staff to 240 FTE. This time, however, their contracts included formal standby and voluntary sign-up to call-out text alerts.

Making it work

Today, homeworkers are still as valuable to the AA as they were in 2007. When a new homeworker is recruited, their property is initially assessed for suitability and to ensure they have a room that can be dedicated solely to their job. They are then provided with all the technical equipment and furniture they need to replicate the AA's call centre environment in their own home. Crucially, staff also undergo a rigorous ten-week training programme and a probation period at an AA site, backed up by ongoing teleconferences and as many face-to-face briefings as site-based staff. This latter component has been successful in ensuring that there is a real sense of community among staff and managers within the homeworking population.



"I love being at home. After years of office work, this suits me."

Cath,
Teleworker

"It feels like I'm working part-time because I have the time to do things in the day."

Angela,
Teleworker

"I wouldn't swap it for anything."

Tracey,,
Team Manager

Speaking at the WorkWise UK Summit in 2008, Edmund King, AA President suggested that the 300 homeworkers at that time saved 212 tonnes of CO2 per year.

"Our employees are saving valuable time and money by working from home ... Homeworkers can do a split shift which covers the busiest times on the road in the morning and evening peak. In transport terms home working cuts out the commute, reduces congestion and carbon emissions. Hopefully other companies will follow the AA lead."

British Gas



In late 2009, British Gas trialled and subsequently implemented a brand new way of homeworking.

Choosing the right model

Over the previous 12 months, the utilities provider had been teamed up with a third party virtual call centre company, which had supplied both technology and access to a pool of self-employed homeworkers. As time progressed, however, the utilities firm realised this model wasn't quite right for its service and repair contact centres. Calls are often made when boilers or appliances have stopped working and customers need expert help and advice from staff immersed in a culture of customer care and service. British Gas recognised that its self-employed agents weren't always equipped to provide this level of service. A new approach was required.

The 50-50 hybrid model

Having evaluated various operating models, the utilities provider decided it would be best to bring the homeworking venture in-house, furnishing existing, experienced staff with thin client technology so they could work from their own homes as and when required. Crucially, the firm wanted to run with a blended approach to homeworking; rather than having staff purely working from home, British Gas opted to create a pool of 'OffHome' employees – people who would normally spend 50% of their time at home and 50% in the office, but who could flex up or down either way according to the business' or the individual's needs.

Rapid expansion

When the pilot commenced in October 2009, 30 staff were taken on to validate the new way of homeworking. That group is currently being expanded to 116, with a view to having a total of 140 OffHome workers operational during 2011 – all located within easy access to either the Oldbury, Uddingston, Stockport or Leicester contact centres.

Resourcing flexibly

For senior managers at British Gas, the argument for having this type of employee is clear. Previously, overlapping shifts in the physical contact centre resulted in daily intervals of overstaffing. By giving the OffHome workers split-shifts that they can undertake from home – for example, from 8am to midday and then from 4 to 8pm – the overstaffing issue can be mitigated, thereby resulting in cost-savings for the business.



"It's great not having to tackle the rush hour traffic everyday! I have 3 hours worth of travel in and out of the office everyday - working at home gives me more leisure time."

Mike O'Leary,
OffHome Agent Oldbury

"It was never worth travelling into the office to do overtime due to the distance I live from the office – Now I can sign on at home to help out and earn extra money I love the feeling of being able to help out now that I have the ability to sign on at short notice."

Amanda Roebuck ,
OffHome Agent Stockport

"Working at home saves me money – not only on travel but also on drinks & food. Working in the comfort of my own home is brilliant!"

William Clarke ,
OffHome Agent Leicester

British Gas Services, part of the Centrica Group, is the UK's leading installation and service provider for gas central heating and household appliances, fixing a gas boiler every 4 seconds, 900 electrical appliances every day and visiting 4.5 million homes every year. The network of 8 contact centres handle around 15m calls a year with 1700 (FTE) advisors. Telephony systems are from Vodaphone (for appointment reminders), Cable & Wireless, Genesys and Aspect.

Canterbury City Council



It isn't only the private sector that can benefit from homeworking. 64% of contact centre staff spend some or all of their time working from home.

Work-life balance and job mix

In February 2007, Canterbury City Council offered its 47 contact centre staff the opportunity to spend some or all of their time working from home in a bid not only to drive efficiencies, but also to create a better employee work-life balance.

At the time, 20 people opted to enter the scheme. However, that figure has since grown to 30 and the remaining 17 staff are now set up to work from home should they decide to do so in the future.

Choice in their working lives

According to managers at the council, the strategy is effective because it gives employees more choice in their working lives. With the exception of two staff members who work exclusively from home, the other 28 'part-time' homeworkers have the option to spend two or three days every week answering phone calls from either their home or the office. The remainder of their time is then spent in the physical 'one stop shop' contact centre, and is divided between face-to-face interactions with customers and answering emails and letters.

Flexibility and contingency

In a typical week, the centre handles far more inbound calls than it does other contact types; indeed, for every 650 emails or letters and 3000 face-to-face visits, the centre can expect to receive 10,000 calls. Having staff able to work from home on telephone activity is therefore a sensible tactic – particularly during events such as bad weather which might prevent staff members from travelling in to the office but are likely to result in greater call volumes from customers.

No need to be off work

Homeworking has also proved a useful tool for team members who have needed to look after a dependent or have been quarantined to prevent the spread of infections such as Foot and Mouth Disease. Because they have been able to work during these times rather than registering absent, the volumes of calls that can be handled by the contact centre has grown by approximately 40% since the initiative began. In addition to this, there has been a 20% uplift in productivity.



"(When i moved), it saved me going on a job hunt and I'm still giving something back after all that training."

Sue,
Customer Service Advisor

"I found it much easier to manage than I thought I would... because they like working from home people are more flexible."

Jo Read,
Deputy Customer Services Manager

"Home working wasn't for me. I felt a bit lonely and I kept looking at the housework - But I did recently work from home for two days whilst I had conjunctivitis. Also when my mum came to stay... I worked from home that week - It was great."

Flo,
Customer Service Advisor

Canterbury City Council is a district council in Kent, providing 74 services including Planning, Waste Collection, Electoral Registration and Housing Benefits. The 47 contact centre staff work in both face-to-face service and telephone work - with over 20 now volunteering for working part of the week at home. The centre handles an average of 10,000 calls and 3,000 visitors and 650 emails or letters per week.

Carnival Cruises



When Carnival UK decided to offer homeworking to employees in its Southampton contact centre back in 2008, the rationale was clear: it would provide additional flexibility.

Covering drive-time peaks

The homeworking project has enabled the introduction of split-shifts and create a pool of people who can swiftly mobilise to work from home during period of high call demand or exceptional circumstances.

A prime example of this can be seen in the way the travel company dealt with the adverse weather conditions that hit the UK in January 2010. Acknowledging that members of staff – some travelling over water from the Isle of Wight – were struggling to get into the office, Carnival called on its homeworkers to begin their shifts at 8am, so ensuring there would be sufficient capacity to answer valuable customer enquiries.

Split shifts

Having taken a break of several hours during the middle of the day, the same home-based staff would work an evening shift as well, enabling some of their colleagues in the contact centre to leave slightly earlier and have a better chance of getting home.

Currently, Carnival has ten homeworkers – comprising just over 7% of the entire contact centre population – and three of these choose to undertake split-shifts as standard. It is an arrangement that works well for all concerned. While Carnival benefits from optimum occupancy during the early and later hours of the day, its split-shift homeworkers enjoy the freedom of having time at home to do whatever they want during the afternoon.

This, combined with the fact that none of the ten homeworkers now have to pay for transport or factor travel time into their working day, has had a considerable impact on their overall work-life balance.

Significant reduction in absence

As testament to this, Carnival has reported a significant reduction in its homeworkers' sickness absence rates, with just three of the ten having taken sick leave in the past year as compared to two-thirds of those working in the physical contact centre.

This has been complemented by an uplift in schedule adherence, which senior managers at the travel company say is now well into the 90s for its home-based staff.



“Homeworking has been such a success that we are now widening the perimeter and recruiting directly into this role.”

Julie Warne,
Head of Reservations

“I think homeworking offers better time management.”

Donna Rodger,
Homeworker

“The homeworkers at Carnival UK are really dependable. They are always willing to help their colleagues in difficult times and their customer call quality is excellent. Donna won the CS Agent award from Travel agents last year.”

Maureen Ferguson,
Resource Planning Manager

The television shopping channel QVC faces some unique challenges when it comes to call demand.

Night-time spikes from TV shopping

While most other contact centres observe the majority of their peaks during the day, QVC witnesses its heaviest traffic late at night, when customers are more likely to tune into the channel's TV promotions.

The problem has been exacerbated by a recent deal struck between QVC and ITV to play between 30 minutes and an hour of QVC coverage on the terrestrial channel at around 12:30am every night. Thanks to its strategic deployment of homeworking, however, QVC doesn't have to worry about the 300% increase in calls this new slot generates every time it is aired.

Half hour or hour-long shifts

With a staff-base of 75 people working from home in half-hour or hour-long shifts, QVC has been able to overcome the problem of having to man its physical contact centre during unsociable hours. Moreover, where the company would previously have had to pay its physical contact centre employees to work a minimum four-hour shift – thereby overstaffing by 30 to 40% for three hours either side of the busy period – it no longer faces this challenge. Instead, QVC's homeworkers mop up the additional calls in their single half-hour or hour-long shifts, resulting in significant cost-savings for the business.

Recruiting different people

Admittedly, QVC had a few teething troubles when it first piloted homeworking in early 2008. It initially tried to recruit from within its existing staff base, but found they weren't keen on working the shift patterns the business needed. The firm's senior managers also originally thought it would be sensible to bring homeworking staff into the office for 50% of their shifts, but quickly realised this offered considerably less flexibility to both the business and its homeworkers.

Impressive results

Today, QVC's homeworkers undertake their training in the centre and are thereafter required to come into the office one day a month for team meetings, reviews and a general get-together with other members of the 'QVC family'.

The results of this approach have been impressive. The business managed to achieve a return on investment within just six months of the homeworking implementation and has enjoyed a 13% uplift in occupancy since 2008.



"If I have any problems, I speak to my team manager. Just because I'm working from home doesn't mean I don't get the same level of support."

Marjorie Reynolds,
Home Agent

"The key was to make sure they understood what it would mean to be a home agent and what a week of worst-case scenario shifts would look like."

Ingrid Arnold,
Senior Operations Manager

"I live 17 miles away and used to spend so much on petrol. Now I'm a home agent, my costs have gone down and I can work flexibly - something that really suits my lifestyle."

Margaret Wilson,
Home Agent

Founded in 1993, TV Shopping Channel QVC Employs over 2000 people in the UK and ships some 13.9 million products to customers every year from its 625,000 square foot warehouse in Knowsley, just outside Liverpool. Adjacent to the warehouse is a call centre of 364 seats which answers 15.1 million calls per annum. The centre uses Avaya telephony, Pipkins for WFM and CACI for forecasting..

Shop Direct



The online and home shopping retailer Shop Direct deals with approximately 30million inbound calls every year, a hefty proportion of which are made between the hours of 10.30 and 11.30am and between 3.30 and 5pm.

Resourcing short daily spikes

Although the firm successfully introduced flexible working shift patterns in June 2006 to help combat seasonal uplifts and contact volumes by interval, it realised it needed additional support to cover these short daily spikes. It also wanted a 'buffer' to help it cope with pockets of absenteeism in the business' 'bricks and mortar' call centres during evenings and at weekends.

300 home-workers within a year

Having decided that homeworking could potentially offer a solution, the company embarked on a pilot with 50 homeworkers in October 2008. By January of the following year, the business case was proven and Shop Direct ramped up the implementation over the coming months, employing some 630 homeworkers to handle seasonal call demand during Christmas 2009 before cutting back to its current base of 300.

Self-employed model

What is different about Shop Direct is that it doesn't actually employ the staff itself. Instead, the business has forged a partnership with a third party virtual call centre company, which vets and approves self-employed homeworkers on Shop Direct's behalf.

The self-employed homeworkers pay for their own induction training and equipment, and are aware from the outset that they won't receive payment for absence, sickness or holidays. Critically, they are contracted to work a minimum of 15 hours a week in 30-minute slots – either singularly or consecutively – which they can select from a flexible schedule published in advance by Shop Direct and specifically designed to net any expected shortfall in the weeks ahead.

30% saving per agent

The results to date have been positive. By using homeworkers to manage short call spikes, the business has saved money where it would previously have had to deploy internal shifts at a minimum of four hours apiece. In addition, because its homeworkers are only paid for talk-time and wrap, Shop Direct enjoys 100% productivity from its home-based staff – in real terms equating to a 30% saving per agent, per year, when compared to the cost of in-house staff.



"Home working has been good for me. I thought I was at the end of the road, work-wise, but I simply turned down a different path - one that I enjoy very much."

Jackie Young,
Home Worker

"We introduced chat forums that enable our remote homeworkers to liaise with their peers and managers in the physical contact centres"

Danny Gunn,
Head of Planning and Resource

Shop Direct Group is the UK's largest online/home shopping retailer, with c5m customers generating 50m multi-channel contacts a year. Brands include Littlewoods, VERY, Woolworths.co.uk and Shop Direct Group Financial Services. 7 contact centres employ c5,000 people, handling inbound sales and service calls, outbound calls, financial services contacts, e-mail and white mail enquiries. Technology includes a Cable & Wireless managed service, Cisco's IPCC, Verint workforce management and call recording plus outbound diallers from Aspect.



experts in homeagent solutions

With over 12 years experience working across all industry sectors, Sensée is the UK's leading provider of homeworking solutions. We deliver custom homeworking models including: employed outsourced, self-employed, and pure 'in-house' programmes for our clients' own staff.

We have worked with all the agent deployment models, giving us the unique perspective and expertise to advise our clients on the best-fit model for their contact centre operation.

Our modular technology offers agile voice & data routing to connect the homeworkers securely to your contact centre systems ensuring your homeworkers are integrated and not satellite to your operation.

Our purpose-built remote recruitment, training and management tools facilitate homeworking for the most demanding and complex environment.

Sensée's highly flexible homeworking programmes consistently achieve optimal productivity and quality performance. Our proven methodology allow our clients to lower their costs as well as improve the quality of their overall service delivery through:

- Rostering homeworkers on multiple intraday shifts to match the contact volume effectively, thereby creating a highly optimised environment.
- Providing scalable resource to meet seasonal peaks or unexpected hikes in contacts.
- Sourcing high quality homeworkers through strict criteria to deliver superior customer service to clients.
- Offering pre-qualified employed HomeAgents who deliver the best customer service.

Full visibility & control of HomeAgents, fully secure working environment compliant with most rigorous policies & standards



Sensée ASSETS
Remote recruitment, selection, testing, system diagnostics and virtual training solution

Sensée MIG
Real-time administration of network IN queues, multi-channel, multi-tenanted & fully resilient



Secure, Encrypted Operating System

Sensée TeamTonic
Real-time remote team management, monitoring, coaching, scheduling and reporting



Sensée's unique understanding of homeworking will enable your contact centre operation to meet the challenges of the years ahead by providing tried and tested methodologies that get the very best results for your business.

Homeworking for contact centres is gathering pace in the UK and it is widely accepted to be a need-to-have strategy. Ensure you have the best advice by calling Sensée.

Call the team today on 0871 200 3164 to discuss your plans or requirements.

Supplier Listing

The Professional Planning Forum exists as an industry body to help members share best practice and establish recognised benchmarks that support professional standards. The support of our associate members and other suppliers is key to the long term growth of this professionalism. Our members need to leverage the benefits of today's complex systems and gain advice from specialist service providers or consultants whom they can trust to deliver appropriately. Thank you to all the suppliers who are supporting our homeworking best practice guide this year.



Contact: David Cartwright Tel: 07785 772540 dcartwright@arise.com

Arise, founded 13 years ago, is the leading provider of virtual business services, with over 16,000 agents serving 45 clients in the USA and Canada.

Arise entered the UK market in 2008 and has now grown to serve two main clients through 850 Arise Certified Professionals.

Our tagline embodies what we stand for: Work. Freedom. Trust. Results. We are proud of the Work we do, the Freedom we create in the lives of our agents and in the way that clients can choose our services, the Trust we earn from customers, and the exceptional Results we deliver. For more information please visit us at: www.arise.com



Contact: Peter Hubbard Tel: 0207 8500490 phubbard@cloudbasesystems.com

Cloudbase transforms the cost structure of your business operations by helping you deploy a home based strategy for your employees. We provide your employees with a fully managed IT and telephony infrastructure in the home, enabling the same secure systems access to required information and telecommunications as they would have working in your office. We conduct health and safety assessments, support your employer's duty of care, assist with recruitment and provide the ongoing technical support for your home based employees anywhere in the UK. Our feature rich managed service offers flexible options and contract terms providing you with a very attractive operating expense model that will address many of your business needs. For more information please visit us at: www.cloudbasesystems.com



Contact: Amanda Fennell Tel: 0800 280 2888 sales@newvoicemedia.com

NewVoiceMedia provides fast, flexible and cost effective virtual contact centre technology for businesses of all sizes. Our solution, ContactWorld™, is ideal for organisations looking for enterprise class call centre functionality, at a fraction of the cost of traditional systems. The solution is delivered as a service over the Internet for a monthly fee per user. ContactWorld can be implemented in weeks not months, additional users can be added in minutes, and home agents activated instantly, in response to demand fluctuations. NewVoiceMedia customers include Kingston University, Parcellforce Worldwide, SHL Group, and Wokingham Council. ContactWorld is available for a free one month trial. For more information visit www.newvoicemedia.com



Contact: Mary Phillips Tel: 01480 484110 info@q-max.com

Q-Max is the most widely installed workforce management system in the UK. Proven to work for those implementing a homeworking strategy Q-Max WFM is a powerful day-to-day management tool for scheduling contact centre agents to respond to customer demand. Q-Scope is a strategic planning tool for start-up contact centres or refining the performance of an existing operation. Q-Me is a call back system for when things get really busy and Q-Pay enables secure automated payments. For more information visit www.q-max.com



Contact: David Thorley Tel: 0871 2003164 david.thorley@sensee.co.uk

Sensee is the UK's leading expert on the design, build and deployment of custom homeworking solutions for contact centres. With over 12 years practical experience in setting up and managing homeworkers across all sectors, we bring an unparalleled understanding of the needs of contact centres and the remote distributed workforce. Our services focus on driving costs down by applying flexible intraday shift patterns for increased productivity, whilst maintaining high quality standards by attracting the highest caliber of homeworkers. Our proven technology and processes have helped our clients achieve savings between 20-25% and improve customer satisfaction by 40%. For more information visit www.sensee.co.uk



Best Practice Programme

The Best Practice Programme combines our research and web resources with visits and events which are free to members using their member places and available to others on a pay-as-you-go basis, subject to availability. The programme will allow you to:-

- Visit award finalists, to see how they achieve success
- Benchmark yourself and learn how others tackle key issues
- Build your network for best practice and support

Seminars

Our regular Best Practice seminars are held in venues throughout the UK. See the latest research results and hear from members about recent initiatives, with plenty of chance to talk with others and find out how they do things.

Annual Conference

With over 500 delegates Customer Contact Planning, incorporating the Innovation Awards, is the biggest planning event of its type in Europe. The must-attend event for everyone who is serious about planning in contact centres to improve the customer experience.

Site visits

Site visits are a chance to see first-hand the challenges faced by different centres and the tools and processes they use. Why not take the chance to visit the Innovation Award finalists during the summer and autumn?

Networking events

A growing range of opportunities include local discussion groups, topic-based groups, dinners and social events. These provide the chance to meet your fellow professionals and discuss common issues.

Benchmark research

A unique source of objective industry data, our research helps specialists identify opportunities for improvement and supports the case for change.

Skills and career framework

Our framework can help you identify the skills you need to influence improved performance. It outlines the skills and capabilities that are needed in a wide range of common job roles in contact centre planning and analysis, and gives clear guidance for assessment.

Free online networking, newsletter and webinars

Read our e-mail newsletter to keep up-to-date without leaving your desk and sample our member resource library and our on-line discussion room. Take part in our webinar programme which includes technology updates, benchmark research sessions, reviews of events and much more.

Look online for the latest dates and subscribe for our free newsletter at:
www.planningforum.co.uk



"The challenges we face today, may not resemble what we have overcome in the past. The experience, time and understanding required to achieve success in our goals are not always available within our own resources. Utilising the support of others not only helps us achieve today, but also makes us ready for the challenges of tomorrow."

Dave Vernon
Head of Best Practice
Professional Planning Forum

"A great way to gather ideas and solutions for existing problems within our company."

Christopher Soutar
Bupa

"Excellent seminar, relevant and topical. Information and advice was thought provoking and provided a sound base to both prepare and adapt for the future."

Gary Moffat
Centrica

"I enjoyed it all, the tutorials were good as they were a check point on my progress"

Gareth Taylor
British Gas



Membership

Membership of the Professional Planning Forum recognises your place within a wider professional community and your organisation's commitment to the contribution of planning and analysis. By joining, you get access to a wide range of opportunities to build your network, share best practice and keep up-to-date in a time-efficient manner.

In the past, analysts and planning specialists have been isolated with little recognition, no formal support and reliance on a few key people, whilst the team was overloaded by immediate deadlines. Membership works alongside our professional development, training and in-house services to give you support in building the profile and contribution of the planning team.

Individual membership

Year-round advice and support for call centre analysts & planners

- **Share best practice and learn from others**
- **Use great discounts on your own professional training**
- **Advice or pointers when starting new projects**

Individual membership is ideal for the smaller centre with only 1 or 2 resourcing specialists - or for larger centres as a low cost way of establishing the benefits of membership. Use your member login to access research or case studies and avoid re-inventing the wheel. The optional enhanced gold package offers a full conference place at under half price.

Corporate Membership

Serious about developing the planning team?

- **Maximise your return from resourcing specialists**
- **Support and advice in developing planning within your centres**
- **Use member discounts and free places for professional development of your own planning specialists**

Corporate membership is for contact centres that have now reached a critical size or maturity and want to develop further. Corporate membership offers advice in developing the planning team, access to our best practice materials and involves you in setting the forum's research priorities.

Associate Membership

As an associate member, suppliers to the industry can be part of our growing, dynamic network and work with us to shape the future of the profession and help establish recognition of the skills and training that are required to leverage the benefits of today's complex systems.



"I now have more confidence in my own abilities. I realise the issues faced are common and can be overcome."

AnneMarie Walker
Student Loans.

"I'll be able to think about where we are as a contact centre and how to take us forward"

Becky Denness,
East Sussex County
Council

Individual membership

- **Your personal logon to our member-only online resource library**
- **Local or topic-based networking groups & online discussion forum**
- **Free phone/email advice for new projects**
- **Email newsletter**
- **Training discounts for personal use and colleague rate for member events**
- **Up to 3 free site visits / seminars for you or colleague (normally £195)**
- **Up to 2 networking events for you or colleague (normally £40 each)**
- **Free conference place included in Gold Membership**

Corporate membership

- **Training discounts and web logons for all nominated members**
- **On-site annual member best practice review in one of your centres**
- **Local or topic-based networking groups & online discussion forum**
- **Free conference places**
- **Free site visit/seminar places**
- **Free networking event**



Certificates in contact centre planning & analysis

Foundation Certificate

This programme works outstandingly well in the first year of a new role or as a refresher for those with more experience. We combine intensive introductory training with four months' of mentoring support, to help new planners and MI analysts contribute faster and grow in confidence.

- **The three day introductory course** - Intensive training introduces the essential knowledge and practical skills required to be effective in your role
- **The four-month mentoring programme** - Practical help when you get back to your own centre with action planning, regular telephone coaching from our expert tutors, a benchmarking site visit, three process reviews and a project learning log
- **The final certificate integration day** - Get back together to assess progress, share results, gain further input on specific issues and develop a continuing professional development plan



Specialist Certificate

The Specialist Certificates combine two training courses with our unique 12 month development programme of mentoring and project work, offering formal recognition of your professional specialism.

- One training course in your area of specialism, eg; scheduling, long-term planning, analysis or back office planning
- A second course from our professional skills training
- 12 month mentoring programme with our expert tutors to develop your skills through the day-to-day experience of your existing job role, applying new ways of working to deliver measurable benefits
- Practical project work, completion of a benchmarking exercise in your specialist area, learning logs and two project reports
- Specialist Certificates can be used to gain credits towards an Advanced Certificate in Contact Centre Planning

Advanced Certificate

The Advanced Certificate offers a unique structure for your professional development and a formal recognition of your advanced skills. The two-year programme helps you put new ideas into practice in your own workplace.

- Create a personal training programme of four two-day training modules, chosen from our wide range of specialist training courses, including at least one professional skills course
- Students wanting a confidence booster can take the introductory training from our Foundation Certificate as their first training course
- The heart of the Advanced Certificate is work undertaken in your own centre, supported by monthly telephone mentoring with our expert tutors, use of learning logs and specialist materials, completion of four formal project reports and one piece of benchmark research
- The well-proven mentoring programme helps you to develop your skills and knowledge through the day-to-day experience of your existing job role, delivering measurable benefits through practical project work

Achieving consistently high feedback ratings from participants, our training sessions are lively and interactive, combining exercises, group activities and hands-on PC simulations

Our mentoring programme uses an action learning approach to help you develop your specialist skills and carry what you've learnt in training into your everyday work to get the results you are looking for.

We support you in putting your own ideas into practice.

Personal Support

Custom-built solutions for your organisation

Sometimes a more focused period of external assistance is needed to jump-start changes and support the skills-transfer that builds up your resource planning and analysis capability and delivers performance results cost effectively. We provide targeted in-house services that focus our specific expertise to meet your needs.

- **Are you looking for a step-change in how you plan your resources?**
- **Could you use our wide experience of best practice and skills transfer?**
- **Do you want to tackle a long-running resource issue or adjust your call centre resourcing to new business challenges?**

Fast-track project support

In response to member requests, we now offer short project-based support to provide specific skills within wider projects or to set up models and jump start change, which will then be led by your own internal team.

Use our expertise when you need it

Use our experts' wide range of experience to stimulate discussion on new initiatives or opportunities for a change. The Retainer service is for organisations wanting regular business, planning or benchmark input.

Telephone coaching and mentoring

Building on the highly effective support given through our certificate programmes, coaching and mentoring is now available to organisations planning change or looking to support an individual during a transition period.

Interim Management

We use our own team and wide range of contacts to source suitable candidates for your interim needs. Whether you are looking for someone to lead a specific project or to fill a role whilst a new permanent replacement is recruited, we can help.

Discovery Work

If you are looking for external evaluation of your processes, people or projects, then Discovery Work is for you. We will evaluate your centre and establish what is working and perhaps, more importantly, what can be improved.

Looking at MI, end to end processes, use of WFM and the skills of your people we will provide you with a detailed report and recommendations on how you could improve. We will use the knowledge we have gained from our time in the industry, and our exposure to best practice in many centres to help you drive improvements.



"The model was turned around in a very short time frame which had a dramatic impact in assisting us in making educated decisions at a critical stage of the project."

Guillaume Py
Fexco

"The outcome was fantastic, well worth the work put into it by us all - another building block."

Michael Mulvenna
HBOS

"Your programme has had real value."

Simon Jackson
Egg

Confident, skilled planners are the key to driving improvements



Research shows that significant changes in operational policies and procedures require skills and knowledge that takes resourcing and planning to a different level, well beyond the technical and administrative role that used to be common in many centres.

Today, we need to consider how we make our centres a better place to work and contact, while we deliver the basics brilliantly at the same time!

Contact centres are busy places and sometimes we struggle to keep on top of our current workload, let alone find time to do things differently. Yet every year our research and case studies shows that the industry's innovators do find time and repeat the benefits.

The Planning Forum exists as an independent industry body, to promote best practice and professionalism in contact centre planning. We offer training, accreditation and member support to help every centre develop the confident skilled analysts that are key to contact centre improvement.

Why do it by yourself, when our team of independent experts is here to help you get the results and the recognition you deserve?

Remember that even if we don't appear to offer exactly what you are looking for we are always open to new ideas and one of the major benefits of involvement with the forum is that we can create a bespoke solution for you or point you in the direction of someone who will.



"It can be difficult to solve problems on your own. Creating the time and space for your development, to think about how you work, is very important. Sharing ideas and experience with others can provide a springboard for making change happen. Those who get results and raise the bar, consider different approaches and communicate well with others"

Steve Woosey,
Membership Director,
Professional Planning Forum.

Critical factors in helping your team deliver improved performance and projects.



Source: Planning Forum Benchmark Survey March 2010

5 simple reasons

why you should connect your contact centre operation to Sensée's HomeAgent Network

1 Access the skills you've always dreamed of

The HomeAgent Network gives you access to a rich untapped vein of human resource. You can finally attract the right people, with the right skills at the right time. It's the end of the quality compromise.

2 Become cost-effective

No property related costs, more efficient resourcing and our Attrition Guarantee means lower costs and no liability. Our clients experience an average of 22% savings.

3 Increase your flexibility

Flexibility is king. HomeAgents log on when you need them, and enable you to make your contact centre operation as flexible as you need to meet your service levels consistently. There's no longer any excuses for lost sales or angry customers.

4 Stay in control

The HomeAgent Network integrates within your operation to seamlessly become an extension of your contact centre. Your personnel manage the workflow as before. Your HomeAgents form your own virtual site and follow your procedures, processes and protocols.

5 Make things easy

With all these benefits, you would think that all contact centres would be doing this already. The reason is that homeworking creates a myriad of new challenges that very few organisations are poised to tackle effectively. That's why we created HomeAgents, a turnkey homeworking solution for your contact centre. Want to make your life easier? It's your call.

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