



Microsoft

work without walls

Best Business Practices to Enable Remote Working

By Rieva Lesonsky



About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services, and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

At Microsoft, we're motivated and inspired every day by how our customers use our software to find creative solutions to business problems, develop breakthrough ideas, and stay connected to what's most important to them.

About the Author

As a best-selling author and nationally recognized authority on the impact of technology on small and medium-sized business owners, Rieva Lesonsky has provided strategic counsel to help business leaders grow successful organizations for nearly 30 years.

Lesonsky is the author of several books about business and technology, including *Get Smart* and the best-selling *Start Your Own Business*, and is the co-author of the books *Young Millionaires*, *Ultimate Book of Franchising*, and *303 Marketing Tips*. She provides an insider's perspective on the entrepreneurial experience.

A former editorial director of *Entrepreneur* magazine, Lesonsky has appeared on hundreds of radio shows and many local and national television programs, including "The Today Show," "Good Morning America," CNN, Fox Business News, "The Martha Stewart Show," and "Oprah." She also can be seen regularly on MSNBC's "Your Business."

Lesonsky is the president of [GrowBiz Media](#)—a content and consulting company specializing in covering small businesses and entrepreneurship. She also serves as the editor-at-large at AllBusiness.com and is a regular blog contributor for *Small Business Trends*, *The Huffington Post*, and her own blog, SmallBizDaily.com.

In 2009, Lesonsky was named to *Folio* magazine's "Folio 40" list, which honors publishing's top innovators.





Executive Summary

Did you know that 62 percent of employees believe their productivity increases when they work remotely—away from typical office distractions? Yet, only 15 percent say their companies support remote working arrangements.*

Employers and employees view remote working differently. The underlying issue resides in the two basic principles of trust and control. Business leaders assume employees who work remotely and take advantage of the policy are not really working. This is because of the loss of control. Employers lose direct oversight and cannot witness productivity firsthand.

On the other hand, although employees feel more productive when working remotely, they fear that their managers may fail to acknowledge their hard work because the managers cannot see it. And, they believe it could jeopardize being promoted or result in losing their jobs.

However, research conducted among 3,500 employees nationwide indicates that businesses stand to be more productive by implementing a remote-work policy.*

Additionally, supporting a remote workforce reduces the need for expensive real estate, helps reduce overhead costs, offers workers flexibility and success, and increases job satisfaction and work/life balance.

It's a win-win proposition driven by the rapid evolution of technology, which helps your organization:

- Save money
- Drive profitability
- Increase collaboration
- Empower employees to work more efficiently

In essence, it makes sense to make the “walls” in your business disappear.

This guide provides the information you need to know to bridge the gap, create an effective remote workforce, and improve your bottom line.

** Source: Online survey sponsored by Microsoft and conducted by 7th Sense Research in February 2010 to assess opinions about remote work and the workplace experience. All research results cited in this guide are from this survey.*

What You Will Learn

This guide will help you understand how to create and empower a remote workforce. You will be able to:

- Understand employee beliefs and needs as well as the benefits of remote working.
- Identify the technology and infrastructure recommended for an ideal remote-work solution.
- Introduce a remote-work program in your organization, including best practices.

Understanding the Remote-Work Experience

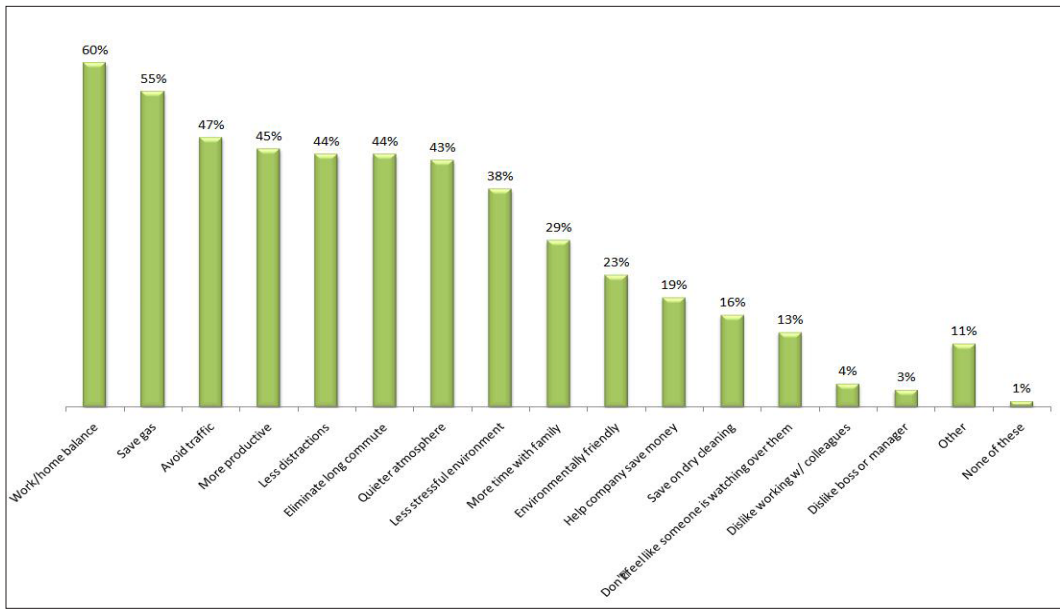
Microsoft recently sponsored a survey of 3,500 full-time employees nationwide to learn about their beliefs surrounding remote working. The results include key takeaways for businesses to improve overall productivity and performance.

Of note, although employees believe they are most productive when working remotely, a high percentage of them believe their companies do not support the practice.

The study found that employees spend an average of 7.3 days each month performing their job functions from home—thanks to the availability of high-speed Internet, Web conferencing technologies, and software programs offering a similar user experience between “home and office.”

Additionally, 72 percent feel positive about remote working, with the number one reason being a desire to achieve a better work/life balance (see figure on page 5). Other reasons cited include the flexibility of working outside the office, the ability to set your own hours, and eliminating commute time.





Peers and colleagues support remote working, but some challenges and internal perceptions do exist. These include the following:

- Lack of face-to-face interaction
- Difficulty communicating
- Perception that remote workers do less than in-office workers
- Technology breakdowns
- Lack of accountability

** Source: Online survey ("Online Survey") conducted by 7th Sense Research in February 2010 to assess opinions about remote work and the workplace experience. All research results cited in this guide are from this survey.*

"Letting people work from home requires a change in mindset. There's definitely an adjustment period. It's important that they create a workspace or environment where they can be productive and for us to provide the tools they need to succeed."

Doane Hadley
 President
 BizTech Solutions Inc.



Is a Remote Workforce the Right Solution for Your Business?

Ask yourself the following questions to evaluate whether a remote workforce suits your business.

1. Are you in a client-service business?
2. Do your employees spend more than 50 percent of their time at client locations?
3. Do most of your employees have laptop computers?
4. Do you have employees who travel frequently as part of their jobs?
5. Do the majority of your employees daily spend more than one hour commuting to and from work?
6. Is the majority of your business conducted in a nonregulated industry?
7. Do your employees have the technology tools needed to work remotely?
8. Does your company have the ability to share documents securely?
9. Do your IT professionals support users in multiple locations?
10. Are your employees open to the idea of working remotely?

RESULTS

To see if your business should consider a remote workforce, add up the number of “yes” answers that you made to the questions above.

7-10: If you answered “yes” to seven or more questions, a comprehensive remote-work program and usage policy has the potential to significantly improve your business performance and employee satisfaction. Read on for additional information on the recommended infrastructure and protocol to best implement this across your organization.

4-6: If you answered “yes” to four–six questions, you would likely benefit from investing in specific communication and collaboration tools, like the [Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite](#), and implementing a remote-work policy.

0-3: If you answered “yes” to three or fewer questions, you may not need a full remote-work program at this time, but you would benefit from establishing a remote-work policy. The policy should outline the proper protocol for employees to follow on the occasions they need to work from home. See page 14 for useful remote-work etiquette tips to share with your staff.

Ask the Experts

Microsoft Solution Partners can play an invaluable role in helping you develop a cost-effective mobile workforce solution to meet the unique goals and objectives of your business. Visit: <https://solutionfinder.microsoft.com> to find a local partner with the expertise required to ensure that your remote workforce is empowered for success.



Establishing the Remote-Work Infrastructure

You've read about the benefits of having a mobile workforce and have decided to proceed with a remote-work policy. This section identifies the items you need to build a strong technology infrastructure to support your remote workforce, including:

- Network Access and Security
- Communications
- Deployment and Support

"The right remote infrastructure strategy streamlines management and control of content, data, and processes across all areas of your business. It simplifies how people work together, making content management a more efficient process, improving the quality of business insight, and enabling IT to increase its responsiveness and strategic impact on the business."

Paul Hillman
Partner
C/D/H Technology Consultants





Network Access and Security

There are a number of options for accessing network resources to support remote working, and products such as Windows Server 2008, Small Business Server, and Windows 7 bring greater administrative functionality and protection to the mobile business world.

Used by 40 percent of employees surveyed, virtual private networks (VPNs) protect company data from the outside world and offer users a secure network connection to Microsoft technology innovations such as:

- **DirectAccess (in Windows Server 2008 R2 Enterprise and Windows 7)** – Automates end-user security protocols, giving your IT department complete access to remote computers in the network.
- **Remote Desktop Services (Windows Server 2008 R2)** – Provides administrators with the ability to control and manage remote computers from a virtual desktop, while granting personal computer users virtual access to their office desktops.
- **BitLocker (Windows 7)** – Uses encryption technology to prevent users from bypassing password protection in the event a laptop is lost or stolen.
- **BitLocker-to-Go (Windows 7)** – Extends password protection to other commonly used mobile devices such as USB flash drives or portable hard drives.



Communications

One of the primary objections that in-office employees cite about their remote counterparts is the inability to reach a remote colleague immediately. Negative perceptions result if this situation becomes a frequent occurrence.

Microsoft Unified Communications solutions help reestablish a rapport between in-office and remote workers. Unified Communications provides information regarding a worker's "presence" and unites e-mail, calendar, instant messaging, voice mail, audio/video/Web conferencing, and voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), including interfaces to other business applications.

With this unification, colleagues are able to communicate and collaborate, and each user has a single identity.

IT professionals can take advantage of Microsoft Unified Communications to manage messaging and telephony communications efficiently and cost-effectively from a single infrastructure.

Microsoft Online Services are cloud-based services, like Microsoft SharePoint Online and Microsoft Exchange Online, that offer flexibility by making it easy to respond to shifting business priorities. At the same time, they provide the added freedom to focus IT resources on the services that users need, when they need them.

Microsoft Online Services' flat-fee, user-based subscription offerings give businesses the benefit of fewer up-front costs and the power to make adjustments to meet business needs.

Communications

There are several options for accessing communication resources to support remote working, including:

- **Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 R2 (and Office Communications Online)** – Offers real-time, person-to-person communication across an organization via instant messaging, VoIP telephony, and video conferencing.
- **Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (and Office SharePoint Online)** – Provides a single, integrated location for employees to collaborate with team members, publish documents, manage content and workflow, maintain task lists, and share information through wikis and blogs.
- **Microsoft Exchange Server 2010 (and Exchange Online)** – Provides industry-leading business e-mail messaging, calendaring, contact management, software-powered voice mail, and improved security with “anywhere” e-mail access.
- **Microsoft Office Live Meeting** – Connects users with colleagues and helps them to engage customers through real-time Web conferencing meetings, training sessions, and events.

Deployment and Support

Similar to how the products foster collaboration within a mobile workforce, the rollout of Microsoft technology solutions to remote users can be accomplished virtually.

Microsoft Unified Communications and Online Services provide easy-to-use solutions that address how to most effectively manage the IT support needs of remote users.

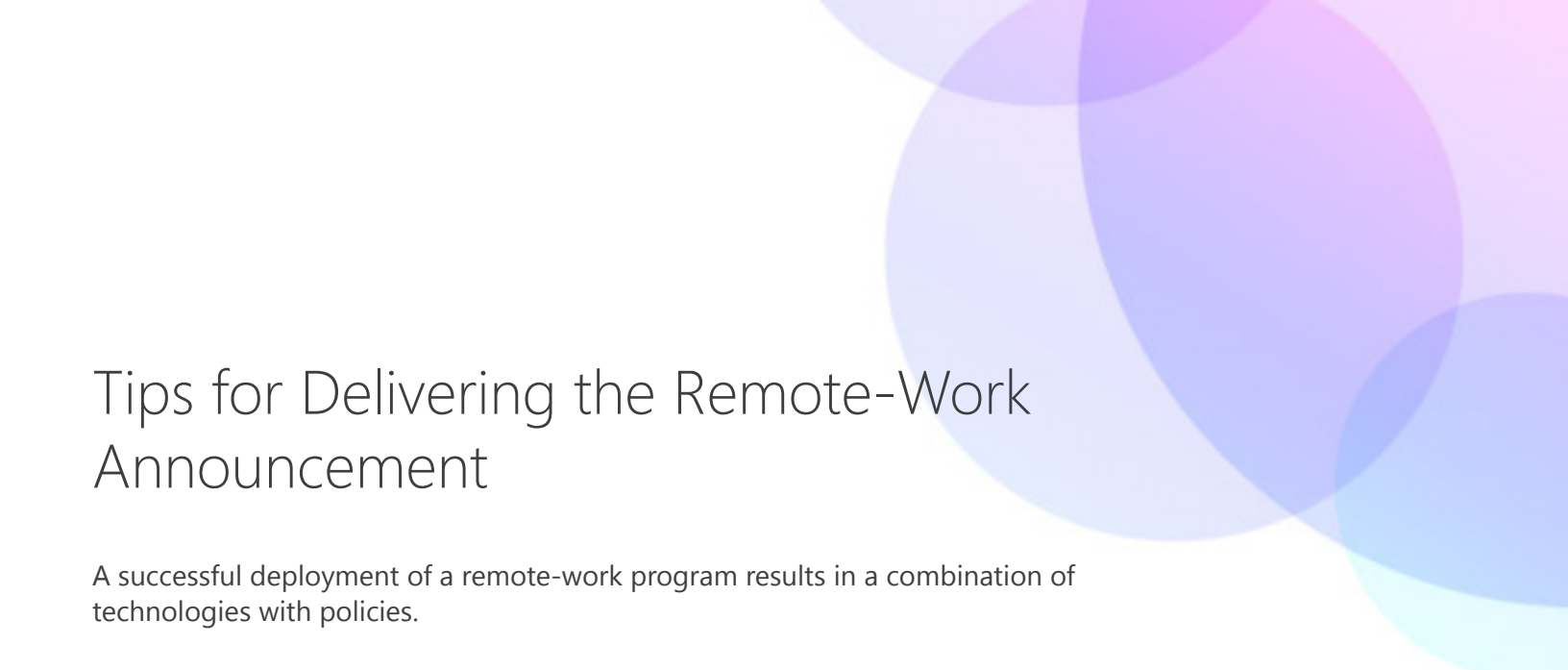
Rather than risk losing productivity from shipping computers to the corporate office or having the added expense of sending IT staff into the field, with Unified Communications and Online Services companies can implement virtual system administration—a process that is completely invisible to the end user.

The benefit is that remote employees can focus their priorities on the things that truly matter to your business's bottom line. After all, it's all about performance.

"Microsoft products work for us. We choose Unified Communications because it mitigates a lot of the risk. It's streamlined and efficient, and it allows us to work smarter."

James Sinclair
CEO
OnSite Consulting





Tips for Delivering the Remote-Work Announcement

A successful deployment of a remote-work program results in a combination of technologies with policies.

After you have implemented the proper remote-work technology infrastructure, it is important to broadly communicate the usage policy. Setting clear guidelines and expectations right from the start helps establish trust between company management and staff, and it ensures effective use of the remote-work policy across the organization.

Consider using the following three steps to help you unveil a new remote-work program:

Step 1. Develop and share a plan that has clear expectations. This includes appropriate use of company property, such as computers and mobile phones, and guidelines on reimbursable expenses.

Step 2. Address any potential concerns. Make it very clear that working remotely will not influence raises, bonuses, or promotions. Doing this reiterates performance expectations and company reward programs.

Step 3. Establish clear channels of communication with expectations and schedules.

Establishing and effectively communicating a remote-work policy sets ground rules and helps to build trust across the entire organization.

According to a survey on remote working, only 41 percent of companies have a formal remote-work policy. In those companies that do have a remote-work policy, only 37 percent of employees take advantage of it.

Remote-Work Etiquette

Although employees may be familiar with workplace etiquette, remote-work protocol is a new horizon. Once your organization implements a remote-work policy, it is recommended that employees are given suggestions for proper etiquette when working outside the office. Following are some tips to share with your staff to help them stay focused and collaborate better with colleagues:

- **Define your spaces.** Separate work from home. Have a room dedicated to working—one that is removed as much as possible from potential distractions. That way, when you enter it, you know it's time to work. This approach helps you change your state of mind from "I'm at home" to "I'm at work." The best option is to use a room with a door for added privacy during conference calls.
- **Make appointments.** You set aside time to meet with someone in person, so why not make appointments for important telephone calls? By booking time, you can be sure that your coworkers will be prepared and focused.
- **Stay focused when on conference calls.** It's easy to stray when meetings go long, but keep multitasking to a minimum during phone conferences. The other party can almost certainly hear your keyboard clicking while you respond to someone else's e-mail message.
- **Stay online as much as possible.** If you are not online, it is likely that people may think you are not working—even if you are. Respond quickly to e-mail and your colleagues will know you are being productive.
- **Be assertive.** Don't always wait for people to contact you. Ask for information if you don't believe you have received it.
- **Establish a schedule.** Keep home work hours similar to those you would keep at an office. Your manager, coworkers, and customers appreciate knowing when you are available.
- **Take breaks.** Plan time to get up and move around. Consider going for a walk or a run during your lunch break to keep your mind fresh.
- **Focus on objectives.** Work with your manager to define clear goals and objectives against which your performance can be measured.

Case Study: BizTech Solutions Inc.

Situation

The use of remote workers has become an integral business strategy for BizTech Solutions, a provider of business solutions, such as data capture, workflow, and document management. With rising gas prices and a need to have a presence in locations across the country, BizTech Solutions migrated to a remote-work model as part of the company culture.

Technology

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server, Microsoft Exchange Server, Microsoft Office Communications Server

Result

An early adopter of Microsoft Office Communications Server, BizTech has capitalized on remote technologies to foster collaboration and better manage productivity of consultants in the field.

The migration to a remote-work model has helped BizTech realize a savings of more than \$105,000 a year in overhead costs. In addition, remote working has helped the organization reduce its carbon footprint and increased cost savings for employees who work from home.

“From my perspective, employing a remote workforce has led to better coverage for our customers and it allows me to spend more time with our clients and employees in the field.”

Doane Hadley
President
BizTech Solutions Inc.



Case Study: OnSite Consulting

Situation

OnSite Consulting is a nationwide hospitality consulting company with 65 employees that focuses on insolvency, distress, or concept repositioning in the hotel, casino, and restaurant industries. Its mission is to help remote workers be more productive. From the company's inception, its founder decided against brick-and-mortar and instead deployed a remote workforce.

Technology

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server and Microsoft Exchange Server

Result

Microsoft SMB technologies have helped OnSite Consulting realize greater e-mail and document efficiencies, while fostering an environment of autonomy among employees.

In addition to an estimated annual savings of \$1 million in overhead, the remote-work policy at OnSite has helped turn staff members into "income generators."

Moving to a remote workforce also has helped OnSite formulate a training program offering growth opportunities for successful employees.

"The mobile organization, time management, and added responsibility have helped me learn how to better manage and judge the performance of my staff."

James Sinclair
CEO
OnSite Consulting

Conclusion

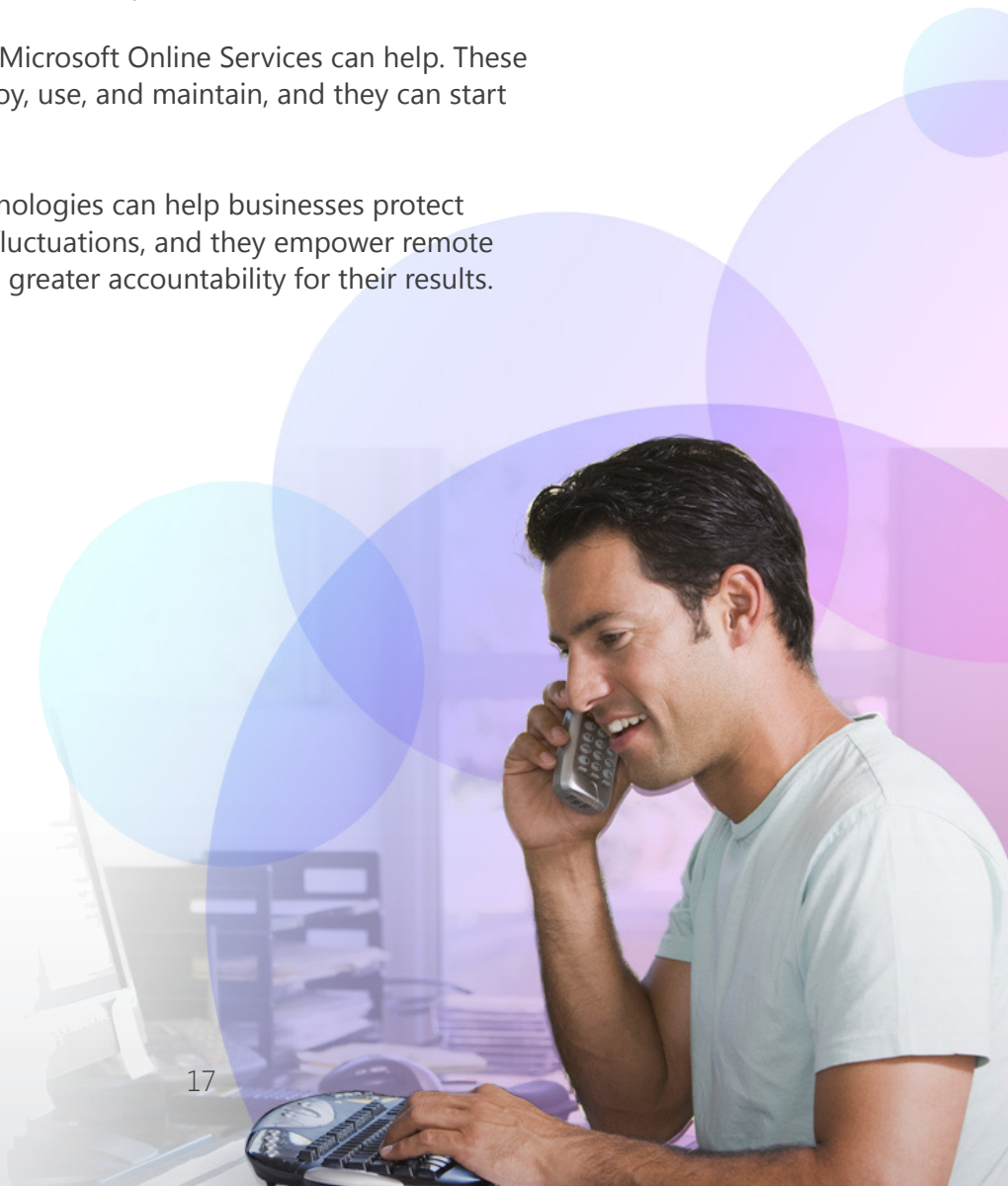
Contrary to what you may think, research shows employees are more productive when working remotely.

To facilitate this trend, businesses can capitalize on many collaboration technologies—including network, security, and communications tools—to create a productive and positive mobile workforce experience for both leadership and staff.

Additionally, for remote workplaces to succeed, it is important to implement technology solutions that create a secure environment for collaboration and to establish clear policies and expectations for employees.

Microsoft Unified Communications and Microsoft Online Services can help. These cost-effective solutions are easy to deploy, use, and maintain, and they can start delivering benefits right away.

With flexible pricing options, these technologies can help businesses protect technology investments during market fluctuations, and they empower remote workers to be more productive and take greater accountability for their results.



Recommended Resources

Microsoft:

[Microsoft Business Resource Center](#)

[Microsoft Solution Finder](#)

[Microsoft Online Solutions](#)

[Microsoft Unified Communications](#)

Business:

[SCORE](#)

[The Telework Coalition](#)

