

# ////// FLEXIBLE WORKING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS //

# INTRODUCTION



The public relations business can often be labelled as female and family friendly, but evidence from recent CIPR surveys has shown that there remains a pay-gap of over £12,000 in favour of male counterparts, and that in PR there is more than double the amount of men who are Owners, Partners and Directors, than women.

These results demand that the Institute takes a leadership stance on gender equality — and promoting, guiding and supporting flexible working in practice is just one route to counter this imbalance.

It is long overdue — to quote from this very report:

“ In senior management roles the industry is losing talented women at an alarming rate, generally at about the time they reach their thirties and attempt to juggle family life with the demands of modern-day practice. It is striking that a female-dominated profession can, still, in effect, be led by men.”

Gender aside, public relations is recognised as an ‘always on’ profession. Every practitioner deserves to have working practices that reflect this and support the needs of both workers and clients. What’s more, as of 30 June 2014 flexible working no longer just became the remit of parents, guardians and carers; but an integral part of modern business culture, with requests for flexible working now open to each and every full-time employee across each and every organisation — by law.

This document is a starting point for management staff looking to create a forward-thinking team that has high morale, strong retention and is fit for the future, and within are nine practical recommendations to put flexible working in to practice.

Flexible working requires a significant culture change. The results can be dramatic in terms of reducing churn, and increasing productivity and the impact on the bottom line. With this in mind, why wouldn’t you want to adopt it?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Hall', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sarah Hall FCIPR, CIPR Board Member

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# WHAT IS FLEXIBLE WORKING?

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Flexible working is an integral part of the modern workplace.

On **30 June 2014**, it became law for all organisations to consider applications for flexible working by members of their staff.

As defined by the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#), flexible working is:

“ a type of working arrangement which gives some degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work. The flexibility can be in terms of working time, working location or the pattern of working.”

**Types of flexible working include:**

- // Part-time working
- // Term-time working
- // Job-sharing
- // Flexitime
- // Compressed hours
- // Annual hours
- // Working from home on a regular basis
- // Mobile working / teleworking
- // Career breaks

The business case for flexible working is laid out by **Working Families**, the UK's leading work-life balance organisation:

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## RETAINING YOUR STAFF

Organisations invest a significant amount in training and developing staff. Most managers would agree it is worth building on an existing team and holding on to people with skills, expertise, client relationships and a proven track record, rather than starting all over again, saving time and money recruiting and developing a replacement. The more experienced an employee is, the more it will cost to recruit and train a replacement.

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## IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

Helping drive staff retention, improved organisational efficiency through the benefits of long service (such as institutional memory, industry knowledge, networks and contacts) is a benefit to be expected from encouraging, for example, women to return after maternity leave.

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## ORGANISATIONAL REPUTATION

For the wider organisation, enhancing public profile, being an employer of choice, enhancing diversity and broadening the recruitment pool are all reasons given for offering more flexible work options. Research indicates that work-life balance opportunities will be a major factor for 21st Century graduates when choosing an employer. Good policies need to be in place to attract good people — it's as simple as that.

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## MORALE, MOTIVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

An organisation's bottom line can be improved through improvements in staff morale, motivation and individual productivity. All three are positively linked to good work-life balance opportunities, where employees feel more in control and are less stressed when reconciling their home and work life. Parents and carers often want to work in different ways than before they had a parental or caring responsibility. Finding ways to do this, perhaps by using flexible working options, lets them give their best at work.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

In public relations, working flexibly often makes business sense — both in terms of working practices and pressures, and in terms of recruitment and talent retention.

As a profession, we are 66% female, but dig deeper into the statistics and you will find that, in senior management roles, the industry is losing talented women at an alarming rate. This seems to be happening at about the time they reach their thirties and attempt to juggle family life with the demands of modern-day practice. It is striking that a female-dominated profession can, still, in effect, be led by men. This is reinforced by the [2014 CIPR State of the Profession survey](#) which revealed that in public relations, there is more than double the amount of men who are Owners, Partners and Directors, than women.

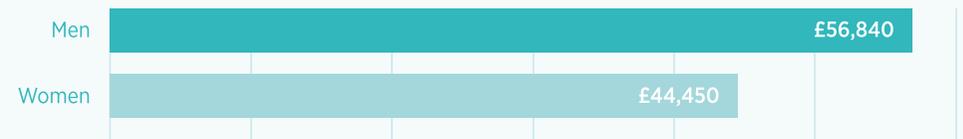
The requirement for management teams to be gender-balanced and diverse is vital in all businesses and sectors, with flexible working being one route to equaling out the imbalance. For communications and public relations it is particularly important that the leadership and the teams behind the campaigns reflect the audiences they are trying to influence.

## Gender make-up of the UK public relations industry



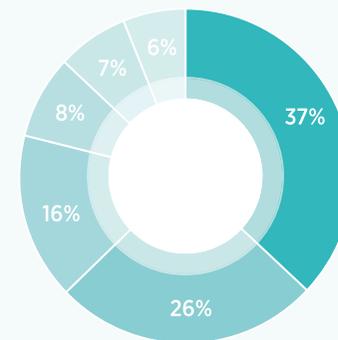
Source: 2,531 respondents who answered the CIPR State of the Profession survey 2013/14

## Gender pay gap in the UK public relations profession — average salary



Source: 2,531 respondents who answered the CIPR State of the Profession survey 2013/14

## What is the most important factor in progressing the cause of equal pay and gender balance?



Source: 431 respondents who answered the CIPR equal pay and gender balance survey, March 2014

## How important is equal pay and gender balance to the future success and stature of public relations?



Source: 431 respondents who answered the CIPR equal pay and gender balance survey, March 2014

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

Currently viewed by some as a ‘nice to have’, the broad diversity and inclusion agenda is becoming ever more valued by clients, business partners and employees in public relations — as ultimately, it makes business sense. In 2013, [McKinsey](#) reported that “companies with more women at the top tend to achieve higher organizational and financial performance” and that “what is good for women will also be good for men, and ultimately for the corporation as a whole”.

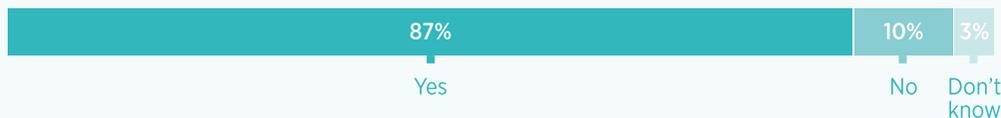
Working flexibly in a client-facing environment can be tough. On top of that, no one who wants to interact with your brand cares about your business hours. However, promoting and enabling a culture that encourages a greater work-life balance is vital for talent retention.

The demands of the 24/7 news cycle and the need to manage a real-time ‘always on’ press office function mean that maintaining a good work-life balance can be difficult.

Accepting that public relations requires real-time communication is one thing, but tackling the unsustainable ‘always-on’ culture of 21<sup>st</sup>-century communications head-on and managing client or colleague expectations accordingly is the only way to retain and recruit the best talent. Moving away from this culture means a shift from work-life balance to work-life integration.

The same technological advances that have caused the change in role and function and the increased pressures on employees provide some of the answers.

## Has the the rise of social media and the 24/7 newsroom had a negative impact on work-life balance?



Source: 431 respondents who answered the CIPR equal pay and gender balance survey, March 2014



The thing about the real-time web is simply that it means your customers, indeed all stakeholders, are having conversations at the speed of... well... er... a conversation. The idea that a dialogue plays out in the Letters to the Editor pages over days and weeks turns out to have been little more than a temporary historical aberration. Conversations play out second by second, minute by minute, on Twitter, blogs, forums, Facebook, Google+, Quora, on the Discussion pages of Wikipedia, on comment-enabled websites run by established news media from the BBC to CNN, from the Financial Times to the Huffington Post, and probably other shiny new services that have sprung up since the time of writing. And this has two major ramifications meaning that monitoring alone is insufficient.

1. Your stakeholders’ expectations of your participation in the real-time conversation may well have changed. Do you understand that? How have they changed? What does it mean to your organisation?
2. You also have to make the decision about which conversations you wish to enter in real-time before they’re effectively over, or indeed before the conversation has run away with itself in the absence of moderating information and responses from you.

In other words, we’re talking here about real-time communication not just monitoring.”

‘Real Time Public Relations’ by *Philip Sheldrake*,  
Share This: The Social Media Handbook for PR Professionals,  
Bloomsbury, 2012

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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The public relations workplace is being drastically changed by a new generation of consumers and employees. The management teams of the future have modern ideas as to how we should communicate, collaborate and transact in business.

Not only does this mean not sticking to post-war office hours, it means that these early adopters of new technology expect flexible ways of collaborative working, use social media and instant messaging to communicate with their peers, utilise apps to consume and share information and have expectations that colleagues keep up-to-speed.

In practice, effective flexible working acknowledges that only by working in tandem with advances in technology to streamline business processes can you increase productivity and output. Flexible working done properly delivers a happy, time-efficient, and engaged communications function. On top of that, it supports equal opportunities for women and men to thrive in the workplace.

## FLEXIBLE WORKING AND THE CIPR CODE OF CONDUCT

CIPR members are accountable to our Code of Conduct, which is based around three core principles: Integrity, Competence and Confidentiality. The Code of Conduct should be adhered to by members in all professional activities, these core principles should also be applied when managing, recruiting and training staff.

This is particularly relevant where staff recruitment and retention is concerned. For example, if a CIPR member was found to be refusing to consider a flexible working request, or rejected a request that wasn't based on strong commercial business grounds, there is a possibility they could be held to account under the CIPR Code of Conduct.

Anyone can make a complaint to the Institute if they believe a CIPR Member (or others for whom they are directly responsible) may have breached the Code.

Further information about the CIPR Code of Conduct can be found on the CIPR website at [www.cipr.co.uk/code-of-conduct](http://www.cipr.co.uk/code-of-conduct).

# THE NEW FLEXIBLE WORKING REGIME: HR AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

WITH NINA ROBINSON, HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES,  
THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PARTNERSHIP LTD



Following the government's Consultation on Modern Workplaces the right to request flexible working was extended on 30 June 2014, by the Children and Families Act 2014.

The right to request flexible working was previously linked to carer responsibilities, including parents of young children, disabled children and adults in need of care. Many employers will have received requests from employees for flexible working in this context before and will therefore be familiar with the current statutory procedure for handling flexible working requests.

For those who are not familiar with the principle of flexible working requests, this is simply the right for employees to request changes to their working hours, working times or location and if granted such changes become permanent changes to their terms and conditions of employment. This is often associated with requests to work part-time following return to work after maternity leave, but is certainly not limited to that scenario. The previous regime included a highly prescriptive and much criticised statutory procedure, which employers must follow when handling the request, including strict timescales for meetings and appeals.

**The changes which took effect in June have the following main implications:**

1. All employees have a statutory right to request flexible working for whatever reason. The only eligibility criteria are that they must have 26 weeks' continuous employment at the date they make the request and must not have made another request within the last 12 months.
2. The strict statutory procedure has been abolished and is replaced with a requirement that employers consider flexible working requests in a "reasonable manner".

This means that although the right has been greatly extended the government have attempted to balance this with a more flexible employer-friendly process.

The requirement to consider requests in a "reasonable manner" appears at first to be vague and difficult to follow, but the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) have come to the aid of employers by producing a Code of Practice on Handling in a Reasonable Manner Requests to Work Flexibly and an accompanying Guide, both of which can be accessed at [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk).

ESP offer innovative employment law and HR services for businesses. They provide tailored fixed fee packages including unlimited legal and HR advice, on-line compliance and best practice resources including fact sheets, letters, contracts, policies and other employment templates. Tribunal case management and representation can be complemented by optional ESP indemnity cover. Please see [www.espltd.info](http://www.espltd.info) for full details of what ESP can offer.

# THE NEW FLEXIBLE WORKING REGIME: HR AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

Although the process outlined in the Code is not statutory it will be taken into account by Employment Tribunals when determining whether or not an employer has dealt with a flexible working request in a reasonable manner and therefore whether or not the employer should pay compensation to the employee as a result of unreasonable handling of a flexible working request.

If you have an existing written policy or procedure on flexible working then this became out of date on 30 June 2014 and if you do not change it then you may be contractually bound to stick to the more prescriptive timescales and deadlines contained within it.

If you do not already have a written policy or procedure on flexible working then it is recommended that if you are an employer, you put one in place. Employers are required to advise their employees of how to make a flexible working request and the information that must be provided. To ensure consistency and compliance with this obligation this information would be best set out within a formal written policy, which should also outline the process that will be followed, the right to be accompanied and the timescales involved.

A key principle of the ACAS Guide relates to addressing attitudes towards flexible working with a view to employers recognising the benefits for their business

in allowing properly managed flexible working arrangements. Many employers find that a flexible workforce suits their business and creates a happy and trusting work environment. In fact, many employers extended the right to request flexible working to all employees, before the change in the law in June. This may allow employers to retain employees that may otherwise have left due to family commitments, voluntary work or other outside work commitments or interests. However, it is important to remember that the legislation does not currently create a right to work flexibly, rather it is a right to have the request considered.

**Full details can be found within the ‘Code of Practice on Handling in a Reasonable Manner Request to Work Flexibly’, but in summary the process for handling flexible working requests should be:**

1. Upon receipt of a written request for flexible working, the employer should arrange to meet with the employee to discuss the request as soon as possible. Employers should give employees the right to be accompanied at the meeting.
2. If the employer intends to approve the request without the need for a meeting with the employee then a meeting is not necessary.

3. All requests should be considered in a non-discriminatory way and can only be rejected for one or more of 8 specific business reasons (which remain unchanged from the previous legislation): burden of additional costs; inability to reorganise work amongst existing staff; inability to recruit additional staff; detrimental impact on quality; detrimental impact on performance; detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand; insufficient work for the periods the employee proposes to work; a planned structural change to your business.
4. Employers must inform employees of the decision in writing as soon as possible. If the request is

accepted (or accepted with modifications) then the employer should discuss with the employee when and how the changes should be implemented.

5. If the employer rejects the request they must give the reasons for the rejection in writing and allow the employee the right to appeal. Any appeal meeting should also permit the employee the right to be accompanied.
6. The overall time period from receipt of the request to completion of the process (including any appeal) must be no longer than 3 months, unless an extension has been agreed by the employee.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH JULIET SIMPSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, STRIPE COMMUNICATIONS



At Stripe we believe if we put our people at the heart of every business decision, we will create an environment where they are motivated and empowered to deliver great work, ultimately resulting in happy clients.

The truth is that our approach to flexible working wasn't something that we spent a huge amount of time debating; it was a no-brainer. We have an amazingly talented team who have a huge amount to give, so if offering them flexible working meant that they would be happier individuals, we knew it was the right thing for them and for the business.

In the last five years 25% of our team have taken time off to have children, not a proportion that any of us could have predicted. When faced with the challenge of how to manage this huge change, rather than viewing it as a problem we decided to treat it as an opportunity. As a small but growing business we set out to champion flexible working so that we could retain our talent, whilst hopefully setting an example for others.

I'm not going to lie, it hasn't always been easy and we've been learning along the way, but one thing hasn't changed. We're fully committed to creating an environment where people can balance their home and working lives and continue to have a successful career if that's what they want.

### Here are our key learnings:

1. One size certainly doesn't fit all — every individual is different and so therefore flexible working can't be a broad brush approach or policy.

2. Follow a process, but be prepared to compromise — if one of our team is keen to change their working pattern we follow the flexible working request process, which gives everyone time to think about their role, the impacts on the business and their colleagues. On every single occasion we have been able to find a solution that works for everyone, but sometimes this has involved a compromise on both sides.

3. Lead by example — support from the leadership team has ensured that the entire agency understands our reasons for flexible working and is supportive of the process and the individuals.

4. Communicate openly and honestly — by being clear on roles and responsibilities and holding regular reviews, we have ensured that everyone is clear on what's expected and comfortable with how things are working.

5. And finally, flexibility — ironically this has been crucial so that where possible everyone is prepared to adapt working patterns in line with a fast-paced agency environment and that we understand family life isn't predictable.

This year we've committed to preparing a 'flexible working charter' outlining our approach to flexible working. As part of that process we're holding workshops with the whole team to gauge their thoughts and amend our thinking accordingly.

We've still got a long way to go, but I'm incredibly proud of the fact that in line with our business performance every single one of our flexible workers is thriving, which just goes to show — putting people first does ultimately make good business sense.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH NICOLA GREEN, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, TELEFONICA UK (O2)



### — What types of flexible working do you offer?

Flexible working is about doing what you normally do, but from anywhere — it is something you do, not somewhere you go. I've been a flexible worker for a while and I can do the same piece of work from my home, an O2 office, the local coffee shop or the motorway services. It's all about being productive regardless of the environment.

Over the last year all our teams have really embraced that — even those that were traditionally office-based. There's been an assumption that flexible working is only for sales or marketing bods, but we've totally disproved that. Our development teams, those in operations, in fact people across all our company now work away from the office at least one day a week.

### — Why do you offer flexible working?

At O2, we believe flexible working offers more than just a way to make everyone happy. At its simplest, it can streamline the business to make cost efficiencies whilst at the same time it increases productivity through an engaged and happy workforce.

### — What do you see as the benefits of offering flexible working?

When O2 trialled a flexible working day, the results measuring productivity were remarkable. The majority (52 per cent) of saved commuting time was spent working; 88 per cent thought they were at least as productive as normal and more than a third of staff said they were more productive. Time normally spent commuting was put to good use too, with employees spending more time with their families, relaxing by playing sport or reading, or enjoying a welcome lie-in. Avoiding their normal commute meant staff saved on their bus, train or petrol fares, amounting collectively to £9,000. The empty car park also hinted at another saving — approximately 12.2t of CO2 was saved on the day, the equivalent of driving 42,000 miles in a medium-sized diesel car.

In summary, higher productivity, lower carbon footprint, retention and attraction of key talent whilst at the same time significant cost savings and competitive advantage are all benefits to consider.

### — What are your top tips to enable flexible working in PR?

It requires teamwork and the right culture especially between agencies and clients, focus and very reliable technology to make it work.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

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WITH **NICOLA GREEN**, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, TELEFONICA UK (O2)

— What do you think would happen if you did not offer flexible working?

The power that flexible working gives to employees to control their own lives, whilst delivering better results because they are more engaged and longer-serving in my opinion would be a real loss to any business.

— Is flexible working more important in PR than other professions?

No. Every discipline in every organisation could benefit from flexible working principles. PR people — men or women — have been managing multiple projects, often outside working hours, since PR began.

— What top tools enable flexible working in your business?

Obviously, collaborative technology like Instant Messaging, smart boards, live meeting functionality, plus smart devices and near universal wifi coverage, play a big role. But, I'd say the biggest thing that any company looking at flexible working needs to consider is a behavioural change.



# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH LEE NUGENT, CEO, NELSON BOSTOCK GROUP



Public relations is a people business. It may be a cliché, but it's true. Our client wins, client work, awards, revenues and profits are all generated on the back of the talent we have at our disposal. And in any company, looking after and nurturing your principle assets makes good business sense.

That may sound like a hard-nosed business view, but it doesn't make it any less of a fact.

Of course, we're also a team-oriented industry. In great agencies our people work hard not only for themselves, but also for each other. They care about the work they deliver and often show a huge amount of dedication, working long hours and going above and beyond what's asked of them week after week.

All of this makes attracting and retaining great people an absolutely critical part of our business. Benchmarking analyses of the PR industry have shown that, for more than half of the last decade, agency leaders have been saying that a shortage of skilled PR consultants is one of the top three threats to our business. And yet we continue to recruit from a notoriously small talent pool, hiring candidates who fit very similar profiles — both in terms of background and working lifestyles.

What's more, as many of our people make step changes in their lives, we have traditionally accepted that we have no alternative but to allow them to exit our business. Perhaps they've chosen to have children, to move away from London (where most of the big agencies are located) or just to do something different with their working days. Whatever their reason, when we let them go we lose a huge amount of knowledge and experience.

And it doesn't make financial sense either. We need to recruit to replace and we're losing all that investment in training and coaching we've already put in.

At Nelson Bostock Group, we've introduced a number of initiatives that have enabled the agency to retain and attract talent it might otherwise have lost or failed to secure.

Across the business, we operate a programme of flexible working hours enabling individuals to time shift their core working day by an hour. This helps the fitness bunnies who want to get to the gym in the morning, parents on the school run, and those with evening classes for example, to enjoy a working pattern that better suits their lives. Employees can also request to work from home, which we support when it's both appropriate and feasible.

Additionally, we employ a number of people in a variety of roles on a curtailed, four-day week. In a couple of cases, this has allowed our colleagues to run their own business initiatives which we believe makes them even more rounded employees for us, while enabling them to scratch an entrepreneurial itch.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

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## WITH LEE NUGENT, CEO, NELSON BOSTOCK GROUP

A number of parents who work for the Group also benefit from flexible working, where we've embraced a mix of working from home and in the office, as well as using the latest tech to enable working on longer train commutes.

All of this is regularly monitored for effectiveness and satisfaction on both sides, and we meet with our flexible workers regularly to discuss how things are going and if we can improve how we manage the situation.

### TOP TOOLS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

- // A reliable, fast connection into your firm's VPN. Broadband at home and 4G on the move
- // Instant messenger — keeps teams (and clients) connected and in touch, while also alerting colleagues if you're away/busy/on the phone
- // Your voice (via mobile or in person) — talking, informing and communicating, keeping colleagues apprised of availability. These are absolutely key to successful flexible working

### TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING A SUCCESSFUL FLEXIBLE WORKING PROGRAMME

- // Keep channels of communication open, clear and frequent — not only between the employee and manager, but also with those who have to work closely with the individual who is working a less typical pattern
- // Ask questions and listen to feedback from others and proactively educate teams on the benefits of retaining someone on a flexible pattern
- // Flexibility is required on both sides, especially in an unpredictable client service business. While it may not always be possible for the employee to flex at short notice — willingness when it is, is always appreciated
- // If it's not possible to offer a flexible solution to someone, tell them. If it doesn't work for the business or colleagues, say no

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH SARAH ROWLEY, HEAD OF PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS, SWIFTKEY



*Swiftkey's team*

### — What types of flexible working do you offer?

Flexible working sits at the heart of our internal culture. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are our core days when we expect all staff to be in the office. We encourage everyone to work from the office as often as possible, as working together face to face helps to build team spirit and encourages creativity and a healthy company culture.

We understand that our team lead busy lives, and occasionally there may be things that they need or want to fit into your working day to make their life easier such as a late start to go to the gym or a long lunch to network or see other colleagues. Some people prefer to start early, some find inspiration strikes later in the day. We care more about output and results than clocking in and out at specific hours.

### — How do you manage flexible working requests?

SwiftKey has an open working culture and this extends to our flexible working policy. We trust staff members to abide by the few rules that we do implement in this area but in exceptional circumstances each member of staff's line manager responds to requests on a case by case basis. We always try to be as adaptable and reasonable as possible to staff in these instances and we do what we can to make the time work best for them.

### — Why do you offer flexible working?

Allowing our staff members to work flexibly means that we trust them to work in the way that they want to, resulting in a more effective working environment for everyone. Our founders had a clear vision of the kind of company they wanted to be at the helm of, one that is built on trust, creativity and results, not clock-watching and time wasting.

### — What do you see as the benefits of offering flexible working?

We recognise that people work better in different environments and at different times and we want them to make the most of their working day for themselves and for their broader team. Some people will pop to a CrossFit or company yoga class during the day because they want to have a break and a bit of a sweat before they come back to their work more refreshed. We also attract staff who live as far away as Wales as staff members can work from home twice a week. It's that flexibility that allows us to find and retain the highest level of talent across all areas of the business.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

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## WITH SARAH ROWLEY, HEAD OF PARTNERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS, SWIFTKEY

— What do you think would happen if you did not offer flexible working?

Over time we might find that we couldn't recruit and retain the kind of people we want. Nor could we build the kind of relationship with them that we think would foster the creative thinking that lies at the heart of our business.

— Is flexible working more important in PR than other professions?

Flexible working would benefit employees across most sectors as its ethos, and the fact team members will have different personal preferences, is the same across any organisation. It's more a matter of whether a particular sector is able to cater to flexible working or not — our staff recognise that flexible working is a real perk of the job and don't take it for granted!

— What are your top tips to enable flexible working in PR?

// Trust breeds trust — if you and your team members actually respect and trust one another, productivity levels can soar.

// Communication is key — for effective flexible working to actually work day to day, team members need to be in frequent communication as to when they are in the office or working remotely. Without this basic level of communication the whole system would soon break down!

// Define fixed times when everyone should be in the office, together — despite the many benefits flexible working brings, having certainty around those periods means that we can confidently schedule team meetings, project catch-ups, company celebrations, staff outings, and other events.

— What are the top tools that enable flexible working in your business?

Our online office tools, including Gmail and GDocs, are incredibly helpful as they can obviously be accessed remotely, a wide variety of ways to keep in touch with each other (Google Hangouts, Skype etc) and — while this is a bit of a cheat as it's an attitude not a tool! — we have a mutual desire to make the company and our product the highest quality they can be. The combination of the three makes flexible working pretty straightforward and effective for everyone at SwiftKey.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH LISA FLEMING, HEAD OF PR, ONGO



*Ongo's team*

At ongo, we know people work best when they have the right tools, are in the right place and are left to get on with doing their job.

Flexible working is not a strategy for us, but a culture we are developing.

Ongo is a partnership of companies which includes the largest social housing landlord in North Lincolnshire. We have an in-house PR team of four, but ongo employs over 300.

In the past, people have worked in a particular office, at a particular desk, because that is where their 'communication' is...their computer, phone, workmates.

The reality now is that communication is flexible and mobile — so our first culture change was to roll out iPads to 180 staff and smartphones to pretty much everyone. We also allow people to 'bring your own device' and set it up with what they need for work.

Plus everyone's getting set up to new ways to connect to email, video conferencing and instant messaging — it's about giving people the choice of how they want to work best.

Our customer advisors have been given kit at home so they can take customer calls any time day or night — allowing them to shape their working hours around their family life.

A massive investment — but offset that against greater efficiency, a reduction in the need for office space, so much more access to online resources and it makes perfect sense to us.

So flexible working doesn't start with looking at hours or locations — we believe it starts with IT.

Next we looked at where people worked. With the right kit, most staff can work from home, or choose where to work from. We have no set start or finish times. People know what they have to do in a week — so we leave them to manage their time to do it, in the way it best suits them and their manager. Requests to work specific hours and patterns are still approved by managers but we know there isn't one model of working that suits all.

By offering this flexible way of working, we have developed much stronger relationships between managers and teams and developed a culture of trust.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

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## WITH LISA FLEMING, HEAD OF PR, ONGO

We have found that sickness has reduced, staff engagement has increased (we test it in surveys annually), there is more innovation, people's wellbeing is improving and staff are motivated to go the extra mile.

Without this approach, our sickness was much higher because people couldn't always find ways of balancing home and work, staff engagement was low because kit was inadequate or got in the way of them doing their job and innovation was limited.

Applying this flexible approach in the PR Team is a must. We deal with people and perceptions. We know people are talking, accessing news, sharing content, giving comment 24/7, and all of that shapes their perceptions. The PR Team can't be where the customers are without the mobile devices and the flexibility to work different hours.

But more importantly, because the PR Team can negotiate their hours to fit around with their life commitments too (our online editor's managing his time so he can train for a marathon) it creates a more relaxed, less rigid, atmosphere which encourages creativity and innovation.

### MY TOP THREE TIPS FOR ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PR

- // Be clear about the outcomes you want from your staff
- // Trust them to deliver
- // Invest in the right equipment (staff will tell you what they need, so listen)

### MY TOP THREE TOOLS FOR ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING

- // Citrix, for remote working
- // Mobile devices, for everyone if possible
- // Leadership, to create the culture you want

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

## WITH GEORGINA ELLSE, CO-FOUNDER, THE PR NETWORK



### — What type of flexible work do you offer?

Along with my business partner Nicky Imrie, we have been running our business The PR Network for over eight years. We set up The PR Network with a clear vision: to enable us to work flexibly around our burgeoning families and to encourage and support others to do the same. We started with just the two of us operating a job share and now number a core management team of 6 with over 1000 consultants all over the world who work flexibly for our clients.

Staying true to this approach and vision has helped us grow our business to over £1.2 million and has given us the opportunity to work with clients including Zipcar, Disney and MyFitnessPal who recognise that talent doesn't need to be full time and office based. As co-founders, we both have equal responsibility for the business and aim to work a three-day week, although this can flex up and down depending on the business and our family requirements. We work remotely and use a range of technology to keep in touch as a team. We also have a London base (Central Working) for any of the team to work in London as and when needed.

### — How has flexible work benefited your business?

Having a degree of control and flexibility in our work has meant Nicky and I can grow our families and our business without compromise. Since starting the business we have had 5 children between us (2 boys for Nicky and 3 girls for me — as I write this, I am on maternity leave with my third daughter). We have also grown our core team to ensure the PR Network is successful in winning business when Nicky and I aren't in the business day to

day. We have been incredibly lucky in the team we have brought in to support us and we couldn't have enjoyed the flexibility we've had without them. They have had to adapt to our ever changing agendas and share our workload as and when necessary. We are proud that we've been able to be there for all of our children's key milestones and school events — and anyone that has a school age child will appreciate just how many events there are at school that need parental attendance! This means we often defer our workload and work at evenings and occasionally at weekends to make up for any missed time. We are honest with our clients and colleagues and unapologetic that we are striving for a work life balance.

### — Has your flexible work structure affected your relationships with your colleagues and management?

If anything, our work structure has strengthened the relationship Nicky and I have as co-founders. We often describe our relationship as a marriage and The PR Network as our baby! Successfully running a job share is no mean feat and we have been doing this for nearly 8 years — so veteran sharers! As we are both in similar stages of our lives and have young children we understand each other's motivation and restrictions and are often able to provide extra support for each other as needed. Luckily we've never both had a poorly child at the same time!

We've always been 100% honest with the rest of the team about our home commitments and they have been incredibly supportive of our need to be flexible in how we work day to day. Many of our team are also parents so they also benefit from our progressive approach — like us they work remotely and the team is spread across the UK — from Cornwall to the Midlands, and Kent, Surrey and

# FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PRACTICE

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## WITH GEORGINA ELLSE, CO-FOUNDER, THE PR NETWORK

London in between! When you work remotely total trust is required — over the years we've not felt this trust abused at all. In fact, by offering a more flexible approach we feel our team is motivated to work harder for us, knowing that we support their lifestyles too.

### — How has working flexibly affected your career?

We wouldn't have started The PR Network without the ability to be flexible and I believe that if we hadn't set it up then I wouldn't have come back to work after my first child. Over the years we've met so many people who felt they had to make the choice between parenting and their career until they heard about The PR Network. Without companies like ours which encourage flexible working, the PR world would lose so many talented people who don't want to compromise their life for their career. We feel so passionately that flexible working should be more widespread and more companies, industries and institutions should adopt better working practises that encourage flexibility. We've enjoyed a lot of praise for our approach which culminated in being listed in the Timewise Power Part Time List alongside IBM, Accenture, BP and other big blue chips.

### — What would happen if you did not work flexibly?

I would be very stressed and probably in reality, not working at all which would not suit me at all. For those that know me, I need to keep busy!

### — Is flexible working more important in PR than other professions?

Not necessarily — we believe flexible working is a trend that will impact all professions. From the event we attended at Ernst & Young to celebrate the Timewise Power Part Time announcement we learnt that flexible, part time working is growing across all sectors and all professions — and all levels. It's not confined to gender and age either; the list showcased men and women of all ages enjoying a more positive working experience through flexible working; either by working remotely, working on a part time basis or job sharing.

### — What are your top tips to enable flexible working in PR?

It is difficult to make PR jobs totally flexible as often we need to respond to time sensitive events, announcements and crises. But my tips would be:

- // Make sure that the right resource is available for the client and team and is not dependent on one individual who may not always be able to be on call — a job share is a good way around this — or as we do for our clients, building teams of consultants to work together to ensure round the clock cover
- // Put trust in your team and let them be accountable — they will repay you with hard work and loyalty; and hand in hand with that goes letting go of any micro management tendencies!

// Equip staff with the tools they need to work anywhere, any time, in the way that you have agreed works for the business, the clients and the whole team. That includes technology but also policies

### — What are the top three tools that enable you to work flexibly?

We are continually experimenting with technology to find the best way to drive our business forward flexibly. Our top three tools are:

- // Mobile — we are never without our iphones and continually use mobile internet to stay on top of social media, email and be responsive to our clients 24/7
- // Community management software — we use a tool called BC Social which is a cloud based system for sharing files, project updates and conversations — keeps us updated on the move
- // PowerMeeter — professional, reliable video conferencing system which allows us to conduct interviews on the move with clients and new freelance associates all over the world

# NINE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

## 01 CREATE AN OPEN PROCESS TO CONSIDER FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUESTS

Ensuring all staff are dealt with fairly and in the same way is important. This will create a culture of trust in management processes. An assessment of the impact of requests on colleagues should be undertaken. Legally, requests can be rejected based on up to eight business reasons ([see page 9, step 3](#)). If a request is turned down, employers should attempt to cut through the legal jargon and provide detailed and fair explanations as to why. If necessary, they should offer a reasonable timeframe for reconsiderations.

## 02 STATE REQUIRED WORK HOURS – FLEXIBLE OR OTHERWISE – IN STAFF CONTRACTS

Staff contracts stating that an employee will work an eight-hour day, between the hours of 9am to 5pm, with a one-hour lunch break, are a thing of the past. By clearly documenting within staff contracts the hours\* to be worked in one week, as well as offering flexible hours that aren't restricted to the office, you're more likely to cover the communications function for a longer period. This will have the added benefit of allowing your staff to manage other commitments.

\* Note that, legally, UK workers don't usually have to work more than 48 hours a week on average, unless they choose to.

## 03 EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY AND INVEST IN IT

Collaborative working via the mobile web using tablets, smartphones and netbooks is the next frontier of productivity and competitive advantage ([see list on final page](#)).

Technology lag in the workplace can be off-putting to a new generation of staff who have the newest and shiniest devices at home. Ensuring that employees working out-of-office have access to a working and effective VPN connection and are compensated accordingly if they need a faster broadband connection (or 4G) is critical. Moving your working environment to the cloud is one fast and practical way to provide remote access. The issuing of smart devices, laptops and tablets to support employees may be necessary. Providing training and encouraging knowledge-sharing among staff for them to learn and share new apps, or acquire an understanding of new ways of working, is also important.

# NINE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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## 04 SET RULES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR OUT-OF-OFFICE CONTACT

One of the downsides of mobile devices you have with you at all times is that Managers and Directors often send messages round the clock, in each case expecting a timely response. Setting ground rules that are based on reasonable expectations of out-of-office staff contact for colleagues and clients, and creating a reasonable rota for managing social and digital channels or running a press office function, is an important step in tackling the 'always-on' culture.

## 05 ESTABLISH A BYOD (BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE) POLICY

The adoption of mobile-friendly internet access has meant that employees can carry around sensitive company data on the commute and down the pub. Understanding who, where, when and how staff are connecting to the workplace via their own devices allows you to monitor and manage levels of staff output, and maintain security of business assets.

## 06 ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION

For flexible working to be effective every day, team members need to be in frequent communication with each other. Internal social networks such as Yammer and instant-messaging apps like WhatsApp, mean that staff can connect, generate new ideas collaboratively and solve problems, all whilst breaking down traditional departmental silos. Changing behaviours and attitudes is one of the biggest barriers to acceptance of flexible working practices. Ensuring there is as little disconnect as possible between office-based staff and those working externally is crucial.



# NINE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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## 07 ESTABLISH AND ENCOURAGE A FLEXIBLE WORKING STRUCTURE

Setting periods of core office-working days (e.g. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) can be helpful in creating a structure to bridge the divide that could occur between staff working in the office and those who work at home. Best practice is to define fixed times when everyone is in the office or available for meetings. Certainty around those periods means you can schedule a working week with confidence. Involving those who work flexibly in team away-days and company celebrations is also vital.

## 08 SET AN EXAMPLE AND LEAD 'PEOPLE-CENTRIC' ORGANISATIONS

If flexible working is seen as just the latest workplace fad or just something you 'have to offer' employees will feel embarrassed asking for it. A divide in the culture of your organisation will exist between those who have it and those who don't. Senior management will often need to work towards changing the culture and policies of the organisation.

Leaders and people managers should set an example, explain the business advantages and encourage flexible ways of working and a healthy work-life balance. The power imbalance between the employer and the employee is radically changing the nature of leadership, with more power and control than ever being given to the employee. Engaged workers, who see that an organisation has a 'people-centric' approach, are more likely to be loyal, productive and to find genuine meaning in the organisation.

## 09 ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ISN'T ONE WAY OF WORKING FOR ALL

Employers and employees need to realise that it is not always possible to work flexibly. There will be times when staff are required to work within certain restrictions. Where this starts to happen frequently, managers and directors should consider bringing in extra support. Ultimately, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach. For employees, flexible working must be about managing their role and responsibilities, not only while at the office, but at times that might interfere with outside life.

Accepting flexible working as a key part of modern business, especially in public relations, and creating a culture that rewards staff who go the extra mile (through days off in lieu or agreed incentives) will secure trust and mutual understanding between colleagues. The result should be a fulfilled team and a happy workplace.

# A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

## WITH MARK PINSENT, SOCIAL AND CONTENT LEAD, METIA



I've been living in France with my family for more than a decade now, yet almost all of my work during that time has been for businesses based in the UK. Our move overseas was entirely based on a desire to improve our quality of life, and therefore an ability to work flexibly has always been an essential part.

Since the move to France I've worked in various ways. During some periods I've been freelance, but for more of the time I've been employed on either a part- or full-time basis by agencies. I'm currently full-time employed by integrated marketing agency Metia. The early part of my career (which I'm more than 20 years into now) was spent working with clients in the technology industry. Indeed, a great deal of my current work is with companies producing and marketing technology. I'm lucky in that respect. Technology has clearly been one of the great enabling forces for more flexible working, so when you work for companies producing mobile devices and communications software, you'd hope that they'd be happy for people to make full use of them!

But, as with most aspects of business, culture is critical. I did a piece of work for Microsoft in conjunction with the London School of Economics about a decade ago which looked at the key barriers to flexible working. The biggest one was management practices. Most companies were then (and many still are) managed on the basis of 'presenteeism'. Just by being seen to be in the office, you were seen to be doing your job. This is absolute rubbish, of course, but if companies are still unable to measure the outcome of people's work, it still holds sway.

So that's a critical factor for me. If you're going to allow people to work flexibly — to be more absent from the office — are you giving them explicitly clear outcome-based measures for their work? What can you point at to say, "Yes, you've done the job we've paid you to do", other than the 40 hours?

To be honest, I don't know many people who aren't working flexibly to some degree.

Unfortunately, for many this can mean simply working outside their contracted hours. But flexible working needs to be part of the (written or unwritten) contract that every employee has with their employer. If you're asking for flexibility in your working practices, be sure you're demonstrating the value you're delivering by being given it. Similarly, if your business is expecting people to be available beyond standard working hours, show them that you appreciate it through additional flexibility.

A final point, apropos of nothing but which I've always found interesting. As mentioned, there have been times during the past decade where I've worked part-time, whether through choice or circumstance. On more than one occasion this has raised eyebrows and prompted questions. To make a point, on a number of these occasions I've answered by saying: "I work part-time because I'm a dad." Assumptions are funny things.

# A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

## WITH MELISSA TIMMINS, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, NHS HULL CLINICAL COMMISSIONING GROUP



I work as the communications officer for NHS Hull Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG); we're the organisation who commission hospital, community and mental health services for the people of Hull. My position is highly varied; one day I might be completing 'bread and butter' tasks such as circulating a staff survey or proactively issuing press releases, the next I might be chasing a quote from Hull City Council around one of our partnership projects or organising a photo call. Social media has also fallen to me, working with management on staff social media training and ensuring the CCG's social media platforms are regularly updated and monitored.

I finished university in May this year, and flexible working was certainly on my radar during my job search. I knew I'd have to travel to get my perfect job, I'd always wanted to work in communications within the healthcare sector, and I was more than willing to commute for the chance to work in my dream job. The mention of flexible working in the job description was certainly enticing; it's not the be all and end all but it certainly helped swing things for me when it came down to choosing between two very similar positions.

I'm fortunate to work on flexi-time, so as long as my hours add up at the end of the month then, for want of a better phrase, everyone's happy. It really is a case of give and take; during the production of our annual report, I started work at 8am and finished after 7pm every day, but then on 'slow' days when

finishing off press releases or waiting on information from a partner, no one has any problems with me starting at 9:30 am or finishing at 4:00 pm.

There are some days when it just isn't viable to leave at 5 pm and some days where it makes sense to take time back. Often in PR or communications, you're waiting on other people and then everything happens at once, for that reason it's massively important that those working in the industry have the chance to work flexibly. There have been times in previous agency positions where I've been sat at a desk waiting for a phone to ring and unable to leave until 5:30 pm, it always felt like a massive waste of time and when you know your workload could double any minute, the last thing you want is to be knowingly wasting your own time.

The general feeling among my peers is that flexible working is massively important and I feel as though that's only going to become more important over time. My peers and I understand that our future positions will inevitably involve social media, a form of communication which never turns off, and out of hours working such as crisis communications or attending events, so we expect to be able to balance that out with perhaps working from home on occasion or not sticking to the traditional 9 am - 5 pm day. Realistically PR and communications never has, and never will be a 9 - 5 job, if employers want to attract and retain the best staff then they will have to offer flexible working.

# A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

## WITH LINDSEY COLLUMBELL, INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER, BOJANGLE COMMUNICATIONS



To me, flexible working means opportunity. The opportunity to work the hours that suit me to balance work and family. The opportunity to work for clients I feel a 'fit' with. The opportunity to earn and work in the profession I love.

I am an independent practitioner and have been since 2004. The majority of my career has been in-house and this only changed after I had a child. When my son was born in 2000, I was Head of Communications for a trade association, working 45-50 hours a week in a central London office, with a seat on the board, overseas travel and six staff. My husband and I were masters of logistical juggling and our lives were run by the clock and train timetables. We were existing and this was not good enough.

One day I thought: "What the hell are we doing?". Our son was at nursery for 50 hours a week which was costing us more than our London mortgage. He was nearing school age and I didn't want him to go to a childminder or me miss out on school assemblies, nativity plays, sports days, etc. I wasn't getting what I needed for the work-life balance I craved from my employer as they would not allow me to go part-time or have a job share - agreeing I could leave the office at 5pm to collect my son from nursery was as far as they would go. I had to make a change.

Luckily, I was made redundant which gave us a financial cushion so I did not have to rush a decision on what to do next. Going freelance was not something I had thought about until a journalist friend suggested it. Doh! It seemed the perfect solution.

I found an accountant, set up as a limited company, registered for VAT then starting reaching out to my contacts. Within a few days I got my first bite and landed a six month contract for six days a month. I was off and flying. It has not all been plain sailing, with peaks and troughs in income and the perennial challenge of finding new clients, but I am fortunate that I have never been without a client in over 10 years.

I am up-front about being less available in school holidays, and I schedule meetings around school hours as much as possible. My working day is staggered as I stop work to spend time with my son after school and then often start work again in the evenings. I would be lost without my phone, and feel that my iPad is grafted to the end of my arm, but this means I can work during 'dead' time such as waiting around as my son's chauffeur - Mummy Cabs!

Being an independent practitioner gives me the balance I need to have a family and work. It works for me.

# A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

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WITH **LINDSEY COLLUMBELL**, INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONER,  
BOJANGLE COMMUNICATIONS

## MY TOP THREE TIPS FOR ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING IN PR

- // Be clear about when you are and are not available to work
- // Don't feel guilty if you are not at your desk 9-5. Embrace the opportunity of working hours that suit you and be secure in the knowledge that the job will still get done
- // Build a network of trusted PR practitioners to help relieve peak workloads

## MY TOP THREE TOOLS FOR ENABLING FLEXIBILITY

- // Dropbox gives access to documents when away from your computer. It also enables you to share documents with clients
- // Being mobile – a smartphone and tablet are essential
- // An app to log the work you do ready for invoicing. I use 'Time Master' on iOS

# USEFUL LINKS, RESOURCES AND TOOLS

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## CIPR MEMBER BENEFITS

### Access to flexible working spaces around the UK:

// NearDesk: [www.cipr.co.uk/neardesk](http://www.cipr.co.uk/neardesk)

### Free legal, business and HR helpline for employees and employers:

// Croner Consulting: [www.cipr.co.uk/helpline](http://www.cipr.co.uk/helpline)

## LINKS TO RECOMMENDED RESOURCES AND ADVISORY SERVICES ON FLEXIBLE WORKING

// Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

// Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development: [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

// UK Government advice: [www.gov.uk/flexible-working](http://www.gov.uk/flexible-working)

// Working Families: [www.workingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)

// Women's Business Council: [www.womensbusinesscouncil.dcms.gov.uk](http://www.womensbusinesscouncil.dcms.gov.uk)

## LINKS TO RECOMMENDED TOOLS FOR ENABLING FLEXIBLE WORKING

### Collaborative document working:

// Google Drive: [www.drive.google.com](http://www.drive.google.com)

// Microsoft Office 365: [www.microsoft.com/office365](http://www.microsoft.com/office365)

// Open Office: [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org)

### Community management:

// HootSuite: [www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com)

// SproutSocial: [www.sproutsocial.com](http://www.sproutsocial.com)

// Sysomos: [www.sysomos.com](http://www.sysomos.com)

### Flexible office spaces:

// NearDesk: [www.neardesk.com](http://www.neardesk.com)

### Instant messaging applications:

// Trillian: [www.trillian.im](http://www.trillian.im)

// WhatsApp: [www.whatsapp.com](http://www.whatsapp.com)

// Yahoo Messenger: [www.uk.messenger.yahoo.com](http://www.uk.messenger.yahoo.com)

### Internal social networks:

// Jive: [www.jivesoftware.com](http://www.jivesoftware.com)

// Tibbr: [www.tibbr.com](http://www.tibbr.com)

// Yammer: [www.yammer.com](http://www.yammer.com)

### Live meetings:

// Google Hangout: [www.google.com/+/learnmore/hangouts](http://www.google.com/+/learnmore/hangouts)

// Skype: [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)

// WebEx: [www.webex.com](http://www.webex.com)

### Online/cloud storage:

// Box.com: [www.box.com](http://www.box.com)

// Dropbox: [www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)

// OneDrive: [www.onedrive.live.com](http://www.onedrive.live.com)

### Screen sharing:

// Citrix: [www.citrix.com](http://www.citrix.com)

// join.me: [www.join.me](http://www.join.me)

// Powwownow: [www.powwownow.com](http://www.powwownow.com)