

**- Work from home****THE HACKS**

IF YOU'RE NEW TO REMOTE WORKING, THE AMOUNT OF ADVICE CAN BE BEWILDERING. TO HELP OUT, WE REVEAL OUR TOP HARD-WON HACKS

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**FIND A DEDICATED WORKSPACE**

Don't work on the sofa, at the kitchen table or in any other communal space if you can avoid it. Having a dedicated workspace is important for your mindset, if nothing else.

Of course, most people won't go to the expense of creating a home office for what we all hope will be a handful of weeks of homeworking. However, setting up a table and chair in a spare bedroom – or even your own bedroom – helps isolate you from the rest of the family when you need to concentrate.

Family members also need to be politely reminded to respect your workspace. Just because mum or dad are working from home doesn't mean that they can be interrupted every five minutes.

**GET A KEYBOARD AND MOUSE**

If you're working from a laptop, buy yourself an external keyboard and mouse. Otherwise, you'll find yourself hunched in an RSI-inducing position for hours on end, doing yourself no end of musculoskeletal damage.

You needn't spend a great deal on these. The Logitech MK270 Wireless Keyboard and Mouse costs only £19 from Amazon ( see p30) and will be much better for you than the built-in keyboard and trackpad.

An external screen might be an expense too far if you're only going to be working at home for a few weeks, but do your best to get your laptop screen at eye level. A cheap stand or

even a pile of books will help. If you have a relatively recent MacBook and iPad, you may be able to use the iPad as a second screen for the laptop via Apple's Sidecar facility. Find out how to set that up at [pcpro.link/308side](https://pcpro.link/308side).

### AVOID DISTRACTIONS

It's all too easy to put work on a back-burner while you watch Home

Under the Hammer and destroy a grab bag of Wotsits. Don't have the telly on in the background (although see Nicole's column on p23 for a different view!), don't have your music blaring out, don't have "just one more go" on the Xbox. Try to match your office routine as closely as possible at home. **HAVE A BROADBAND BACKUP PLAN**

While installing a second line is overkill for a (hopefully) short period of enforced home-working, having a backup plan if the main broadband line does go down is worthwhile.

If you've got a decent 4G or even 5G signal in your home (and we do mean inside your home, not in the garden), a mobile hotspot might be a strong backup plan. Your smartphone will almost certainly have the ability to turn itself into a mobile hotspot, but just be careful not to smash past your mobile data cap and run up horrendous bills.

A safer option might be to invest in a dedicated 4G hotspot; EE's version costs £50 from Currys and comes preloaded with 6GB of data, which should be plenty for basic surfing for a day or two until the broadband is fixed. Just make sure you switch off Windows Updates or anything else that might download gigabyte upon gigabyte of data on a mobile connection. If you're using the home computer and the kids have

Fortnite installed, for example, a single update of that game can take 70GB!

If you're a BT Broadband customer and a neighbour's BT network is within range (which they often are), you can also log in to their router with your BT Broadband username and password, and treat it like a Wi-Fi hotspot. It's all perfectly above board. Look for Wi-Fi networks called BTWifi-With-Fon. Even if you're not a BT customer, you can buy daily access passes for £8.

### LEAVE THE HOUSE!

When you work from home you tend to overcompensate, staying chained to your desk for 12 hours in case someone emails and it looks like you're slacking off, watching Lorraine.

At work, you'd probably nip out for a coffee, go to Pret for lunch, or take a five-minute breather on the smoking deck. Don't feel like you're obliged to be chained to the desk just because you're at home. Barry often makes work calls whilst walking the dog at lunchtime, for example.

Cabin fever is a big problem when you first start working from home. Make a conscious effort to get out – as long as you're not contravening government advice by doing so.

### MAKE ALEXA YOUR NEW COLLEAGUE

If you've got an Amazon Echo or Google Home smart speaker, bring it into your office – they really are an excellent work colleague.

For starters, they can both make free phone calls to UK landlines or mobiles, saving you a potential expense of working from home.

They're useful for setting reminders, checking facts, doing basic sums or helping you spell words.

And they go some way to replacing the casual chat in the office. Bid Alexa “good morning” and she’ll give you a funny bit of daily trivia. You can ask her what’s on the telly tonight and, if you’re really missing Colin from accounts, she’ll tell you a succession of dad jokes, too.

#### BOOST YOUR MOBILE SIGNAL

If you suffer from iffy mobile reception at home, taking work calls is going to be painful. However, there are cheap solutions that can make a huge difference to your mobile reception.

The most effective of these is a femtocell, a router-sized mobile mast that routes mobile calls over your home Wi-Fi connection. The BT Signal Assist (which is £20 direct from BT) has stopped dropped calls plaguing Barry’s business, although it has meant that he’s had to switch off 4G on his phone.

All of the major networks will offer femtocell products, although you may well have to badger the network’s support team to prise one out of them. Do not buy femtocells from third parties, as they can’t be guaranteed to work with your network and this is a market rife with shysters.

Wi-Fi calling – again offered by most networks, although handset support varies – is the free option. In our experience, both the “satellite delay” and poor sound quality on calls often make this an unattractive option, though.

#### MAKE COMMUNICATION KING

If you’ve relied on face-to-face communication with colleagues forever, you may be suddenly surprised by how rude they are over Slack or email. Or it could be that, unbeknownst to you, they think you’re being rude. This is simply because people communicate in their own way, and while you may think “OK” is a fine response they may end up searching for a hidden message. Try to be aware of how others like to communicate – a five-minute call at the start of the day may solve no end of problems.

#### WORK REGULAR(ISH) HOURS

To grossly simplify the world, there are two types of people. One that will grasp this opportunity of working from home to binge-watch *The Office*, and another who will feel they must justify their freedom by sitting at their desk from 8am until 7pm every day. It helps to know which of those broad-stroke categories you slip into so you can take measures to stop yourself falling into bad habits, but either way we suggest you set some boundaries. For example, it might be a good idea to instruct yourself to start and end at your regular times. Or maybe you can shift it by an hour. Just be aware, and be sensible.

#### DEPLOY VIRTUAL DESKTOPS

If you’re using the same device for work and personal purposes, virtual desktops can keep the two worlds separate and avoid distractions. You can have one desktop purely for work apps and another for your home life. Note that this doesn’t firewall the two in any security sense, for that you’ll need a virtual machine – it’s purely a cosmetic measure.

The simplest way to open a new virtual desktop in Windows is to click on the Task View button in the taskbar and then select New Desktop. Alternatively, you can use the time-saving Windows+Ctrl+D keyboard shortcut.

On a Mac, you can open a new desktop via Mission Control – press the key on your keyboard that looks like a set of three small windows or find Mission Control in Launchpad. If nothing else, a fresh desktop will stop the problem of icons overflowing in the Mac Dock.

#### PUT WORK/HOME SITES IN DIFFERENT BROWSERS OR CONTAINERS

It makes a lot of sense to have a web browser dedicated to work and another to personal activity. Why? It means that web activity from one browser won't be tracked in the other. So, for instance, you won't see adverts for the 86 toilet rolls you've just tried to order from Amazon appearing in work sites.

More importantly, it puts a distance between work and personal accounts. If you run the social media for work, for example, you can have your personal Facebook account in one browser and your work credentials saved in another, saving you the hassle of logging in and logging out constantly. Likewise for bank accounts. A new add-on for Firefox called Multi-Account Containers actually lets you do this from within the same browser, creating "Home" and "Work" tabs that can have different logins.

If you're going to pick a work browser, we'd go for Chrome ( see p44). It's the one least likely to butt up against "browser not compatible" messages for on-line apps, such as accounting services or CRM.