

Flexible Working

By the end of this decade, Graham Whitehead of BT is quite certain that at least 50 percent of the UK adult population will be following in his footsteps when it comes to flexible working. He is an expert on the subject, having done his own job in this way for ten years, as well as researching, writing and presenting on the subject to a wide range of people from all walks of life.

"Flexible working is happening now, and is evolving by the day" he comments. "In 1990, when I first went 'on the road' as a Marketing Manager for BT Research, making presentations UK-wide, the only way I could keep in touch was to ring the office. There was an awful lot that I simply couldn't do when I wasn't at my desk. Then came the Internet - which has to be one of the most potent forces driving the enormous change in working habits. Thanks to this development, I can have a truly mobile office - in my case in my car. I can carry out every single aspect of my work from there. Nothing is now out of reach. For example, during the 1996/7 BT Global Challenge yacht race, an Australian journalist wanted to file a story. He accompanied me to my car, which was parked on the quay in Southampton, UK, where I lent him my digital camera. He duly took a picture of the yacht. I attached the picture to a Word document that he wrote on my laptop. I then emailed it to Australia, via my mobile phone modem linked to the Internet. Four hours later, the article and picture appeared in print in Australia."

Whilst he himself has clearly sought the ultimate flexible working life, Graham Whitehead is adamant that a large proportion of us will soon join him because individuals and companies will see the advantages both in costs, time and convenience. "Advances in technology means that there is already a change in the way companies operate, in order to stay competitive. Take the recent boom in Internet shopping - that has required some rapid evolution by the organisations concerned, and this is the tip of the iceberg as far as I'm concerned. The Internet has changed everything by offering a ubiquitous and effortless connection - the user can be literally anywhere, as long as they can log on. There is no doubt that every facet of working life is in the process of altering. For instance, I predict the rise of a whole new 'industry' - 'tele-bureaux ' where you will be able to hire a desk for a day, or half day, with all

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facilities - phone, computer facilities, internet connection etc. This has enormous implications for everyone - lots of long-established practices and institutions are going to have to reinvent themselves in order to survive. Flexible working is not just a good choice which I wholeheartedly endorse, it really is going to be how the majority operate in the future. The winners in the *e*-age will be those who can work and play fastest and be agile."

Reprinted from The Times Interface 'visionary' piece by Clare Lowe