

SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH TOOLS

HIRING & MANAGING REMOTE STAFF

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WHY HIRE REMOTE STAFF?

Working with remote staff is here to stay and it is estimated that in the US, 31% of all employees will be remote workers by the end of 2022. Hiring remote staff saves money, increases productivity, gives small businesses access to a better pool of candidates, and improves staff satisfaction, commitment, and loyalty. 85% of managers believe that having teams with remote workers will become the new norm.



LEGAL IMPLICATIONS



There are a number of things you need to bear in mind when hiring remote staff. One of the most important considerations, especially if your business handles sensitive information like medical records or financial data, is cyber security. To protect your data from theft and misuse and ensure you are fully compliant with applicable regulations (HIPAA, GDPR, and other), one of the best options is to use staff monitoring software. We have outlined some of the most popular and affordable platforms available in the Monitoring Productivity section of this paper. Please keep in mind, however, that federal and state privacy laws may be implicated when monitoring and recording telephone conversations, Zoom and Teams calls, emails, and internet usage outside of legitimate business purposes.

Another important area to consider is how you are going to employ your remote staff. In general, there are three options available to small businesses. Hiring contractors through specialized companies like Zoomemployee tends to be the cheapest and most convenient option, while recruiting and employing staff directly the most expensive and complex option.

Depending on your type of business, your budget, your experience with hiring and managing remote staff, and how risk-averse you are as a business owner, each of the options below might be a good fit for you. If you decide to employ staff directly or hire an independent contractor, make sure you seek legal counsel and consult your accountant to understand the full implications of your decision.

OPTION 1 DIRECT EMPLOYMENT

Employing people directly is the least cost-effective option because you will need to spend money on recruiting staff, training them, paying taxes and social contributions for them, processing payroll, and providing benefits like sick pay and holiday pay. In many states, including California, Illinois, Iowa and Montana, there are laws that require reimbursement of remote employee home office expenses. Moreover, if you hire staff out-of-state, bear in mind that some states require a higher minimum wage than others and have more expansive civil rights protections for employees as well as unpaid and paid leave rights. All these legal and accounting expenses as well as statutory benefits can add up to \$15,000 a year per remote worker, and therefore small business owners tend to prefer other options.



OPTION 2

CONTRACTORS & FREELANCERS

Small businesses like to hire contractors because they are cheaper compared to the cost of employees, but also because they don't need to cover the legal protections and benefits of regular employees. However, the legislation in this field is evolving rapidly because of the growing popularity of this option and the relatively low level of protection offered to contractors and freelancers. Therefore, you will need to remember to regularly check federal and state labor laws and regulations to ensure you fully comply with all legal requirements. Moreover, you will still need to handle recruitment, contract and invoice management, W8 or W9 forms, 1099 appendices, and other aspects of working with remote contractors. When working internationally, you may also need to handle inter-cultural differences and misunderstandings.

OPTION 3

REMOTE STAFFING COMPANIES

Unsurprisingly, therefore, most small businesses choose to work with partners like Zoomemployee instead because it is the most cost-effective, low-risk option. These companies offer top-quality, pre-qualified remote candidates available immediately, employ these candidates directly, handle all legal and taxation aspects of hiring them, and know how to comply with out-of-state and offshore regulations. If you choose to work with Zoomemployee, you will only pay the hourly rate, there are no additional fees, and you can treat your weekly invoice as a simple business expense. The company also has legal associates in every country in which it recruits staff and ensures that all sections of their contracts are legally enforceable in your worker's locations, which is particularly important when it comes to NDA agreements and non-competition clauses.

SCREENING APPLICATIONS

Small businesses need to be agile and adaptable to survive and prosper. Therefore, they should keep their staffing structure as flexible as possible and avoid costly long-term staffing commitments that involve severance pay and other challenges.

Moreover, while in a large company there are clearly defined roles with a formal organizational structure, in a small business everyone has to pitch in and role boundaries are more fluid. Therefore, you should look out for candidates who have experience working for small businesses or start-ups. Often, people who worked for a large company before joining your team will struggle as they are used to clearly defined roles and feel uncomfortable with the unpredictability of a small business.

Therefore, small business should seek to hire people who have the ability to, and are happy to multitask and it is important to find suitable candidates who have a number of added-value skills beyond their core competences. It feels great when you find a candidate with extensive experience in their field but there will be times when you will need their help in other areas too, and they should be able to support you hands-on with as many different tasks as possible.

For instance, when you hire a customer support specialist, consider shortlisting candidates who have a range of add-on skills that they can utilize when your phone lines are quiet and they don't have anything to do. Most small businesses can benefit from skills like graphic design, website maintenance, photo editing, social media, online research, and admin support. This will help you to build a flexible team and get the best value for money for every hire.

Lastly, try to find someone who has worked remotely before. It takes a particular mindset to be able to work from home and stay motivated and productive, and people who never worked remotely may really struggle with this set-up and may not have all the equipment they need to be an asset to your company.

HERE ARE OUR TOP 5 RED FLAGS YOU SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF WHEN SCREENING CANDIDATE APPLICATIONS:



CANDIDATES MOVING JOBS EVERY FEW MONTHS

This may indicate that they lack resilience, are permanently unhappy with their employers, or have poor communication and teamwork skills.



NO RECENT WORK EXPERIENCE

While there may be a very good reason for that, the candidate may struggle to fit back in into a full-time job unless they are very disciplined and organized.



GRAMMATICAL ISSUES AND TYPOS

Even though you may not need them to write letters for you, this may indicate the candidate's lack of attention to detail and professionalism.



POOR CV FORMATTING AND DESIGN

While this is a matter of taste to a certain extent, a poorly laid out resume may also indicate that the candidate is not tech-savvy and uninterested in learning.



COMPLEX TERMINOLOGY

Confident candidates who value themselves do not need to inflate their CV with complex terms, sweeping statements, and inspirational quotes to fill the space.

INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

Working remotely comes with a number of challenges. Therefore, when you consider hiring remote staff, your interview questions should be designed to check if the person you are interviewing has the right attitude and skills to be successful and productive working from home.

Therefore, in addition to professional qualifications and relevant work experience, being a remote or virtual team member requires a particular set of skills and qualities to succeed: Troubleshooting and stress management, time planning and prioritizing, self-discipline and great organizational habits, self-confidence and the ability to work independently, excellent communication skills and knowledge how to collaborate effectively online, as well as self-motivation skills.

While it would be impossible to cover all of these in an interview or as part of your candidate pre-screening process, here are the top seven questions to ask a remote candidate that will allow you to get a feel for how they will handle working from home:



Q1



If you are experiencing a power cut and have lost your internet connection and have an important project to complete and then a meeting to attend in the next couple of hours, what would you do?

Q2



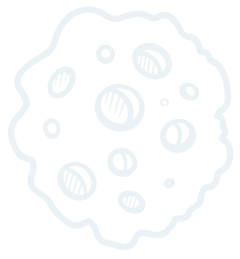
In your opinion, how does remote communication with clients and colleagues differ from in-person communication in a shared office? What steps will you take to address the potential communication challenges of remote collaboration?

Q3



Can you please tell me about your home working arrangements – for example, do you have a dedicated room where you can work without being disturbed? How reliable is your internet connection and the technology you will be using for this role?





Q4



What strategies do you use to address the inevitable stress and lapses in motivation at work? Does working from home mean added pressure for you, or do you prefer to work independently and remotely?

Q5



How do you go about prioritizing your tasks and deciding which tasks are more important and more urgent than others? And what would you do if you were assigned two conflicting tasks that cannot both be completed on the deadline provided?

Q6



What online collaboration tools have you used in your previous projects and roles? Which of these tools do you prefer and recommend, and why?

Q7



Imagine that you encounter an urgent issue when the rest of your team is offline, and you are unable to reach them. You need to make a decision that will have a significant impact on the company. What would you do?



Lastly, don't forget to hire based on the candidate's attitude and personality. In a small team in particular, your hire's attitude will make a huge difference. A positive, enthusiastic person with a can-do attitude and a great sense of humor will be a huge asset and will help you through your challenges, inspiring you to make lemonade out of all lemons your business throws at you.

We recommend that you use scenario questions in your candidate interviews as they are a great way of finding out how they would handle different situations.



MANAGING REMOTE STAFF



Research studies show that to get the best out of your remote team, it is essential that you adjust your management style because remote professionals who work from home have different preferences and needs than traditional employees. Here are the top three areas you should focus on when managing remote workers:

01

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

One of the biggest challenges of remote working is that people feel left out and isolated. Quick daily video meet-ups will help you develop a sense of togetherness and a shared purpose. Try to use video as much as possible because seeing a face is very important for people to feel connected. In addition, remember to share all relevant information you have with your remote team so that they feel involved, respected, and included. Many remote staff resign because they feel left out and state in their exit interviews that they got demotivated because they didn't think they were treated as part of the company.

02

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

When working with remote staff, it is essential to establish clear rules of engagement and expectations to avoid misunderstandings and frustration. Tell your staff their working hours, which meetings you expect them to attend, how you will contact each other and when, and which tools and apps you want them to download and use. Set weekly and monthly outcomes and deliverables for each remote member of staff. Make sure that their targets are clear and specific, have a deadline, can be measured, and are realistic. For example, instead of asking your virtual assistant to research better suppliers, ask them to find three suppliers who offer a better price for the same product and are based locally by the end of the week.

03

USE TECHNOLOGY

To communicate effectively and make sure that everyone feels like part of the team rather than an independent freelancer, use free collaboration tools and apps like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Microsoft Teams, and allocate and oversee tasks through project apps like Trello, Asana, or Monday. Most of these platforms offer great free versions and have engaging, fun features that help create a great remote working atmosphere. Asana, for example, has dancing unicorn and singing walrus stickers that you can award to your team members to thank them for completed tasks, ideas, and contributions.





EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Some experiences available when you work with someone in the same office are just not accessible – for instance, bonding with your team members over a cup of coffee or leaving them a quick note with tasks on their desk. Therefore, training, liaising with, managing, assigning tasks to, and motivating someone you have never seen in person comes with some challenges. Luckily, there are many tools and platforms available for working together remotely and building a great relationship with your work- from-home staff:

ZOOM MEETINGS



When you create a free Zoom account and share the link to your personal Zoom meeting room with your team, you can meet there any time, share your screen with your team, and run videos and presentations for them to see. Use in-app backgrounds and accessories to dress up for the next online team meeting, and consider introducing a weekly or monthly virtual happy hour for your team to create a fun opportunity for you to bond!

WHATSAPP AND VIBER



These popular apps allow you to call, text, and video chat with your remote staff for free at any time. Create a team group chat to share your news and project updates, screenshot any issues and quickly send them to your team, or receive documents and photos from your staff.

SLACK AND ASANA



Both platforms offer free basic accounts, which include all essential features to get you started. On Slack, you can upload and share documents and, more importantly, send instant messages to teams and individuals. Asana is a great tool for managing team activities by creating project plans and assigning tasks to different project members.

GOOGLE SUITE



Get everyone in your team to create a free Google account and work from different locations and devices with your staff simultaneously. The platform allows you to upload your Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents and everyone with the link to your documents can work on them online from wherever they are located.

BASECAMP



This platform allows you to store and share documents, policies, photos, videos, and projects. It allows you to create to-do lists for staff and project teams, post announcements on the message board, and send automatic reminders to your team when tasks assigned to them are overdue.



MONITORING PRODUCTIVITY

One of the biggest challenges of working with remote staff is monitoring their productivity and performance. Even though in a traditional office, business owners cannot oversee every minute of what their employees are doing and research shows that computer-based office staff spend up to 28% of their working time checking their social media accounts, reading news, and online shopping, the inability to see what their team members do when working remotely causes a lot of anxiety.

Luckily, there are many tools available to help you monitor what your remote staff are doing, how often they switch off, and how productively they use their time. Here are our top 3 recommendations:

INTERGUARD

This is one of the best solutions on the market for monitoring remote staff, and one of the very few that offer free trials before you commit to it. It is easy to use and install and is compatible with all common operating platforms and browsers (Mac and PC). The platform allows you to get a remote view of your team members' desktops, monitor productivity, protect yourself from data thefts and fraud, and set up the so-called 'suspicious activity alerts' for when your staff are idle or browse social media during their shift. Even better, they offer 24/7 customer support.

TERAMIND

This platform has a very comprehensive tracking functionality that captures different types of user activity, depending on what you choose, from screen recordings, live views of your remote employee's PC, tracking their emails, and monitoring their Zoom sessions. It also allows you to track time worked, see your staff's productivity, and protects your sensitive data from being stolen. You can even block out undesirable websites and content so that your staff cannot access them!

ActivTrak

This platform offers free and paid plans, and therefore you can try it out to see if it is a good fit for your needs. The platform has a very simple-to-navigate user interface and you can learn to use it within minutes. In addition to monitoring and tracking your staff time, it provides a range of productivity insights and analyses. Depending on the metrics you are using, it will help to identify areas for staff training, and it is one of the most affordable solutions on the market, making it perfect for small and micro businesses.

And here are our runner-ups:



HIRE REMOTE STAFF NOW


Are you ready to hire full-time remote staff? We specialize in supporting small businesses by offering top-quality remote workers from \$7.00/hour. Our candidates have 3-10 years of experience in their field, are fluent in English and multi-skilled, available immediately, happy to work weekends, and are positive, flexible, and adaptable. We charge no additional fees and you only pay the hourly rate:



Personal Assistant	\$7.00/hour
Customer Service Specialist	\$7.50/hour
Social Media Assistant	\$8.00/hour
Amazon or Ebay Assistant	\$8.00/hour
Sales Assistant	\$8.00/hour
Graphic Designer	\$8.00/hour
Online Marketing Manager	\$8.50/hour
Bookkeeper or Accountant	\$8.50/hour
Other Remote Staff	contact us

Treat your invoice as a business expense. Auto-pay using your company card. Cancel any time by giving a 2-weeks notice. During your first week, cancel any time.

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