

Teleworkers at a Panera Bread café, a nontraditional worksite popular for its free Wi-Fi. Panera touts itself as “a place to get away from it all while staying connected to it all.”



Productivity Untethered

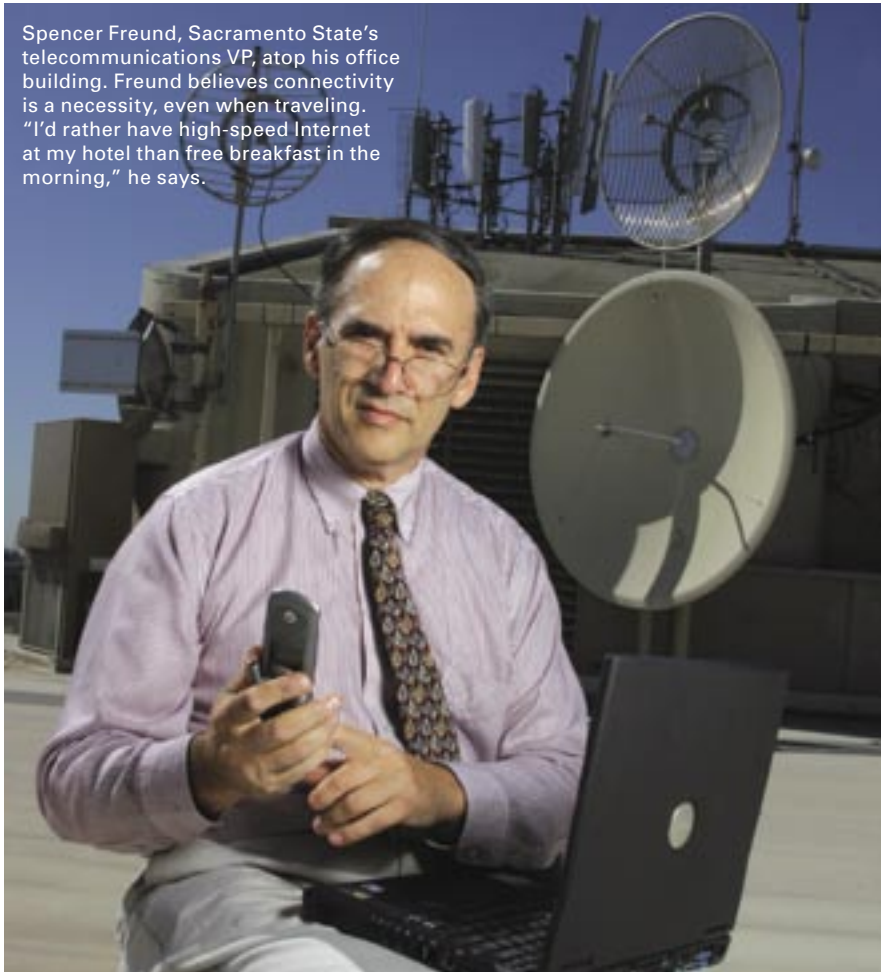
ALTERNATIVE
WORKPLACES ARE
TRANSFORMING THE
WAY WE DO BUSINESS

by Michael P. Scott

Like many business leaders, John Tamplin is continually on the go. As the president of Seafloor Systems Inc., an oceanographic consulting firm, Tamplin lives what many would describe as a nomadic, fast-paced existence.

One week you will likely find him in either his Seattle or Portland office. Then his travels might take him to the East Coast the following week to meet with a client. He is on his cell phone constantly and doesn't go anywhere without his laptop in tow. On a good day, you might even catch him working from the kitchen table at his El Dorado Hills residence, where he stays connected to his business for hours on end via a home wireless network.

Spencer Freund, Sacramento State's telecommunications VP, atop his office building. Freund believes connectivity is a necessity, even when traveling. "I'd rather have high-speed Internet at my hotel than free breakfast in the morning," he says.



ment. One is the broad deployment of high-speed broadband and mobile-communications technology, which have made it easier for on-the-move business leaders to stay connected regardless of where they're located.

Another factor involves the number of corporations shedding significant overhead by not housing employees in pricey office space.

There are also growing numbers of working professionals demanding flexible arrangements that allow them to work out of a home office and create greater balance between their home and professional lives.

"The bottom line is that all companies should consider moving in this direction because of the huge cost-savings potential," says Jim Ware, co-founder of the Berkeley-based Work Design Collaborative, a firm dedicated to addressing questions about how the changing workforce, new technologies and new workplace designs are transforming the very nature of work.

Work Design's research indicates that as many as 20 million people worldwide will be using what the firm refers to as "third places" by 2007, and that many individuals will spend 25 to 35 percent of their total work time in these new kinds of locations.

"The use of these alternative work settings allows for a far more agile environment for an organization," says Ware. "This is critical given today's talent worker demands for more flexible work arrangements."

There is also evidence that alternative work arrangements can enhance worker productivity by reducing interruptions, eliminating office socializing and curbing the prevalence of unproductive meetings. Some workplace experts are even advocating telework as a way of more effectively managing commuting costs and allowing individuals to make better use of time that would otherwise be spent in a car.

"Our mantra has always been to move the work to the people instead of the people to the work," says Ware. "Two days not commuting to work is 40 percent fewer miles driven. That's significant."

Tamplin's life offers a taste of today's new breed of business leaders, renegades who are enthusiastically bucking traditional office settings and embracing a lifestyle that is increasingly wireless, virtual and flexible.

It is a revolution with enormous business and social implications for the Capital Region economy. Many consider it the wave of the future: As communications technology continues to mature, companies are moving away from expensive corporate office space and working professionals are demanding more freedom in their daily lives.

As this phenomenon continues to evolve, a new body of language is rapidly emerging. *Telecommuting* and *telework* are the words most commonly used to describe working at home, at a client's office or in a satellite location. *Hot desking*, *hoteling*, *distributive work* and *virtual office* are other terms that imply some form of nontraditional work arrangement.

So how big are alternative work arrangements? According to a 2005 report released by the International Telework Association Council, an estimated 45 million Americans did some form of work from home during the past year. Seconding that notion, the Society for Human Resource Management estimates that nearly 40 percent of corporations nationwide offer some form of virtual-work program.

Experts say there are a number of factors influencing the telework move-

In a new survey ...

53% of employees said their employers are very supportive of work-life balance;

45% of executives felt the same way.

SOURCE: OFFICETEAM

PHOTO: NOEL NEUBURGER

In response to increasing interest in telework arrangements, many public locations throughout the Capital Region are now catering to the needs of working professionals by offering amenities such as wireless Internet access, temporary workstations and printer stations.

On any one given day you will find legions of busy commuters in coffeehouses, airports, hotels, convention centers and other nontraditional worksites checking and responding to e-mails, writing sales proposals and doing research on the Web. In some cases, these locations have become regular offices away from the office.

Visit one of the growing number of Panera Bread restaurants popping up in the Capital Region and you will often find laptop-toting leaders engaging in business meetings over a roll and coffee. Panera is also a popular hangout for professionals who need to make



Oceanographer John Tamplin mapping a lake floor in Iraq. Thanks to broadband, Tamplin says, "no one had a clue that I was in a faraway foreign country."

quick online connections before client meetings to check in with the home office or send off a proposal.

Ask them what attracted them to Panera and they will tell you that they come for the great food; the beautiful

interiors, complete with fireplaces; and of course, the free Internet access.

“Our environment offers working professionals a great alternative to either a home or formal office,” says Mark Crowley, a spokesman for Panera Bread, which is headquartered in St. Louis, Miss. “It offers a great option for an offsite meeting place, as well as a stopping point for people to come

in and grab a quick bite to eat while checking e-mails.”

Many public locations are now offering subscription-based or free wireless service. In the case of service businesses like hotels, high-speed Internet is becoming a business traveler requirement, not an amenity.

“For me, it’s no longer an issue of whether a particular hotel or public lo-

cation offers Internet access, but rather, how fast the connection speed is,” says Spencer Freund, associate vice president for academic affairs and telecommunications at Sacramento State. “Quite frankly, I’d rather have a high-speed Internet connection available at my hotel than free breakfast in the morning.”

The Sheraton Grand Hotel, nestled at the epicenter of downtown Sacramento’s political and business community, is one such location that has responded to the needs of today’s connected traveler.

“We have wireless Internet service in all of our guest and meeting rooms,” says Gunter Stannius, the Sheraton’s general manager. “Access is also available in our lobby area, along with two printer stations for guest use. We have found that both hotel and non-hotel guests frequently take advantage of the opportunity to connect online while attending a meeting or waiting for a flight.”

Hotels, coffeehouses and restaurants are not the only ones getting in on the act. Sacramento International Airport recently began offering free Wi-Fi, dropping its fee-based service. In addition, there is talk of wireless broadband service being offered on the Capital Corridor train line from north of Sacramento to San Jose. This proposed service would allow travelers to browse the Web, exchange e-mails and otherwise make productive use of their time while barreling along at 80 miles per hour.

When Ron Rogers began his new position as public relations manager at SureWest Communications in July of last year, he planned to move his family from the East Bay to the Sacramento area.

The housing market in which he lived, however, took a sudden turn, and Rogers was faced with the prospect of taking his home temporarily off the listings and commuting from the Bay Area to SureWest’s headquarters in Roseville.

After several months of enduring long, grueling commutes, Rogers approached his boss in February about the prospect of a temporary telecommute arrangement until he could sell his house.

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“Working out of my home two days a week has made all the difference in the world as far as cutting down my time on the road,” says Rogers. “That two-hour commute each way, every day, was becoming rather exhausting, and there were times when I was getting home at 8 or 9 o’clock at night, which is not ideal when you have a family.”

Rogers sees real value in an effectively designed telecommute arrangement. “My boss has been very supportive and flexible as far as my telework situation, a factor which has had a real positive effect on my productivity. Mentally and physically, working from home two days a week has given me more energy to devote to my duties.”

Rogers says the transition has been surprisingly transparent. “I am able to connect with our computer system from home, and my cell phone is connected to my work phone so that I only have to check one voicemail box. Most people haven’t a clue as to whether I am at the corporate office or home office unless I tell them.”

Because his work requires him to travel extensively, Larry Bawden, president and chief executive officer of Folsom’s Jadoo Power, the world’s largest supplier of portable fuel cells, also makes use of a full complement of technology tools to stay connected with clients, investors, new recruits and other key Jadoo stakeholders.

“It seems like I’m constantly online these days, either through my handheld device or laptop,” says Bawden. “These tools are my saving grace for brokering business deals, recruiting new talent for the business, and building relationships with potential investors.”

He envisions a day when the fuel cell innovations his business is known for will serve as the primary power source for laptops, cell phones and other remote technologies being used in the business world.

“We are at the forefront of solving what I call the ‘last wire problem,’ which now requires technology to be connected to an electrical outlet or grid for its power,” says Bawden. “Fuel cell power holds great promise for virtual workers, particularly in remote locations where they may not have a traditional energy source to tap into. The day is rapidly coming when you’ll be able to pull out your laptop anywhere in the world and have eight to nine hours of continuous power without having to plug into an electrical outlet.”

Globalism’s impact on today’s mobile business leader is becoming more and more evident as communications technology reaches new levels of sophistication.

Tamplin of Seafloor Systems believes technology allows for ease of connection with others regardless of where one is located in the world. “It was pretty cool to discover that the hotel I was staying at in Iraq while on a consulting assign-

ment had satellite Internet service,” says Tamplin, whose company conducted geophysical surveys of the bottom of Mosul Lake in Iraq.

“Essentially, it was business as usual for me once I was connected,” he continues. “I was even quoting customers for new project bids in the States and no one even had a clue that I was in a faraway foreign country.”

Tamplin says the Internet has become crucial to his ability to connect with his team of people, who are regularly scattered about on assignments. “The majority of our workers have home offices that are located in

the latest encryption protocols and firewalls in place to protect against unwanted intrusions.”

Some are concerned about the alternative work craze’s impact on social connections. There is also the argument that situating people in remote settings interrupts the natural flow of communication and interaction that is so critical to productivity.

But advancements in technology also mean companies no longer have to invest in office space for employees, and professionals appear to like the freedom these arrangements afford. “I say to companies that are considering this, ‘Let ’em work out of their homes a couple of days a week,’” says Work Design’s Ware. “Wait a minute, no — ‘Tell ’em to do it.’”

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— Jim Ware, co-founder,
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various points throughout the U.S,” he continues. “If it weren’t for broadband,” he continues, “it would be virtually impossible for us to communicate.

Tamplin has become accustomed to going online and identifying free Internet-access points and remote workstations in the cities he will be visiting. “Any hotel that I stay in has to have broadband service or I’ll look elsewhere,” he says.

According to Dan Root, president of Technify, a Sacramento firm specializing in information technology, a major element in the alternative work movement is the convergence of cellular, wireless, mobile PC, office networking and many other forms of technology packaged together into fully integrated solutions.

Root does, however, harbor some concern about the security aspect of mobile technology. “While there are some advancements on the horizon, a number of vulnerabilities still exist in wireless security,” he says. “It is therefore critical, particularly for mobile professionals, to ensure that they have