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Be a Mobile Office Maven

Published June 28, 2007

These days, the world is your workspace. Be productive and successful from anywhere and everywhere with the right tools and tricks.

By: MATT ALDERTON

Patrick Gray is on the road for more than 150 days each year. Just because he's out of the office, though, doesn't mean he stops working. Quite the contrary, in fact. Gray, author of *Breakthrough IT: Supercharging Organizational Value Through Technology* and president of Prevoyance Group, a Charlotte, N.C.-based IT consulting company, makes a habit of working from home when he's there, but when he isn't he sets up shop in airports, on airplanes and at hotels—in other words, wherever he has to.



"I have slowly perfected my mobile office over the past several years," he says. "Pretty much anywhere I've managed to get a pretty good mobile office set up and have it work wherever I need it to."

Gray's not the only one, either. The country's mobile workforce is growing by leaps and bounds every day thanks to the proliferation of wireless hotspots, smartphones and lightweight laptops. And in a world of round-the-clock connectivity, the most mobile businesses—the most accessible, in fact—are often are the most successful. Which leads to the critical question: How mobile are you?

Get Connected—Now

These days, experts say, being mobile is both a privilege and a requirement—especially for small business owners.

"We no longer are living in a world of nine-to-five, fixed-location business operations," says Andy Abramson, CEO of San Diego-based marketing company Comunicano and author of the [Working Anywhere blog](#). A self-described road warrior and global nomad, he travels so much that he considers a day trip to San Francisco from San Diego a commute rather than a business trip. "If your livelihood depends on being in contact with your customers or colleagues—if you're somebody who lives in the one-second world—then you have to be connected all the time."

Maybe not all the time, according to Tom Shaughnessy, director of business marketing for [Sprint](#), but certainly most of the time. "Separating small businesses from the competition is obviously customer care and the differentiated services they bring from a client relationship perspective," he says.

In other words, your customers are connected 24/7; in order to give them the customer service they demand, you should be, too.

Equip Yourself

The key to having a productive mobile office is having the right tools with which to make it function.

"I consider today's modern-day road warrior like a carpenter," Abramson says. "You have to have all the right tools on your belt, but you don't have to use all of them all the time."

Having the best gadgets on your tool belt will allow you to take advantage of the mobile office's most attractive feature—flexibility—according to Damian Herrick, worldwide product marketing manager for [Lenovo](#). "Being mobile allows you to work on your own schedule," he says. "When a good idea strikes, you have the ability and the tools to capitalize on it. Having everything you need to do your job at your fingertips whenever you need to do it really allows you to run your business well."

So what weapons, exactly, should a mobile entrepreneur be ready and able to wield? Start with the essentials:

Laptop Computer: If you're going to actually work remotely, as opposed to just staying in touch, you'll need a good laptop on which to do it. Herrick recommends the [Lenovo 3000](#) series, which he says was designed especially for small business users. "What you need," he says, "is a reliable laptop with a decent sized hard drive to run the applications you need and to store the data that you want to carry with you." Don't overdo it, though, on features, speed and storage that you don't need.

Wireless Access: Of course, a laptop isn't enough. To be truly productive away from your home base, you'll need wireless Internet access, as well. Abramson recommends getting a monthly hotspot account, such as one from [T-Mobile](#) or [Boingo](#), which for \$21.95 per month gives you unlimited access to most of the country's major hotspot networks.

For a little more each month, you can skirt the hotspot networks entirely in favor of a mobile broadband connection card, which will allow you to access the Internet via cell phone networks. "It's plug and play," Shaughnessy says. "It really allows you to have Internet access from literally anywhere you have [voice] service."

Smartphone: You no longer need a computer to wirelessly get online. You can do that easily and affordably with a high-quality smartphone—"smart" because it's both a cell phone and a PDA—which is ideal for checking e-mail and staying on top of appointments and phone calls.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time I'm using my smartphone," says Leo Bletnitsky, president of Desktop Valet, a Las Vegas-based IT consultancy, "because a laptop you've got to boot up and find a connection before you can use it. With my smartphone, I don't have to do anything; the e-mail just flows."

Mobile Phone: Not everyone needs a smartphone, but everyone ought to have a good cell phone with useful features. Bletnitsky, for instance, recommends a phone with call forwarding, so that you can receive landline calls on your cell and vice versa.

"Voice is still a very important piece of the mobile office," Shaughnessy says. He urges mobile workers not to overlook the importance of standard features such as reliable voicemail, push-to-talk and Instant Messaging. If you've got a smartphone, he adds, look for one that's compatible with Outlook and has on-demand Web access, as well as GPS if you spend a lot of time on the road.

Can't answer your phone? Try a voice-to-text converter, such as [TalkText](#), which converts your voicemails to text files that you can read on your PDA.

Hosted Software: If you're on the go a lot, Herrick recommends taking advantage of hosted software solutions, such as [Google Docs](#) and

[Salesforce.com](#), which store your data online for remote access from any computer. "Hosted applications for a small business can be a really powerful tool," he says, "because you don't have to carry around a more expensive laptop in order to run a fast database or store content."

Universal Charger: Tired of carrying around heaps of cords and chargers? Gray recommends investing in a universal charger that will work on all your mobile office devices.

Security: When you're mobile, security is imperative, Herrick urges. He recommends investing in a cable lock for your laptop computer, as well as taking password protection measures for your machines and documents. Bleitnitsky agrees and also suggest outfitting your laptop with anti-virus software, as roaming on multiple networks leaves your computer vulnerable to attack.

Take a Break

Once you've finally got your mobile office up and running with the latest mobile gadgets, there's just one thing left to do: Turn it off.

"Just because we can be connected all the time, we feel we should be," Gray says. "One thing I like about having all these capabilities, though, is that I can go on a Friday and ride a motorcycle or do something outside and watch the world go by. If you're going to have this capability, you might as well use it to get out of the office and smell the roses every now and then."

Links referenced within this article

Working Anywhere blog

http://andyabramson.blogs.com/working_anywhere/

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http://www.sprintbiz.com/small_business/

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